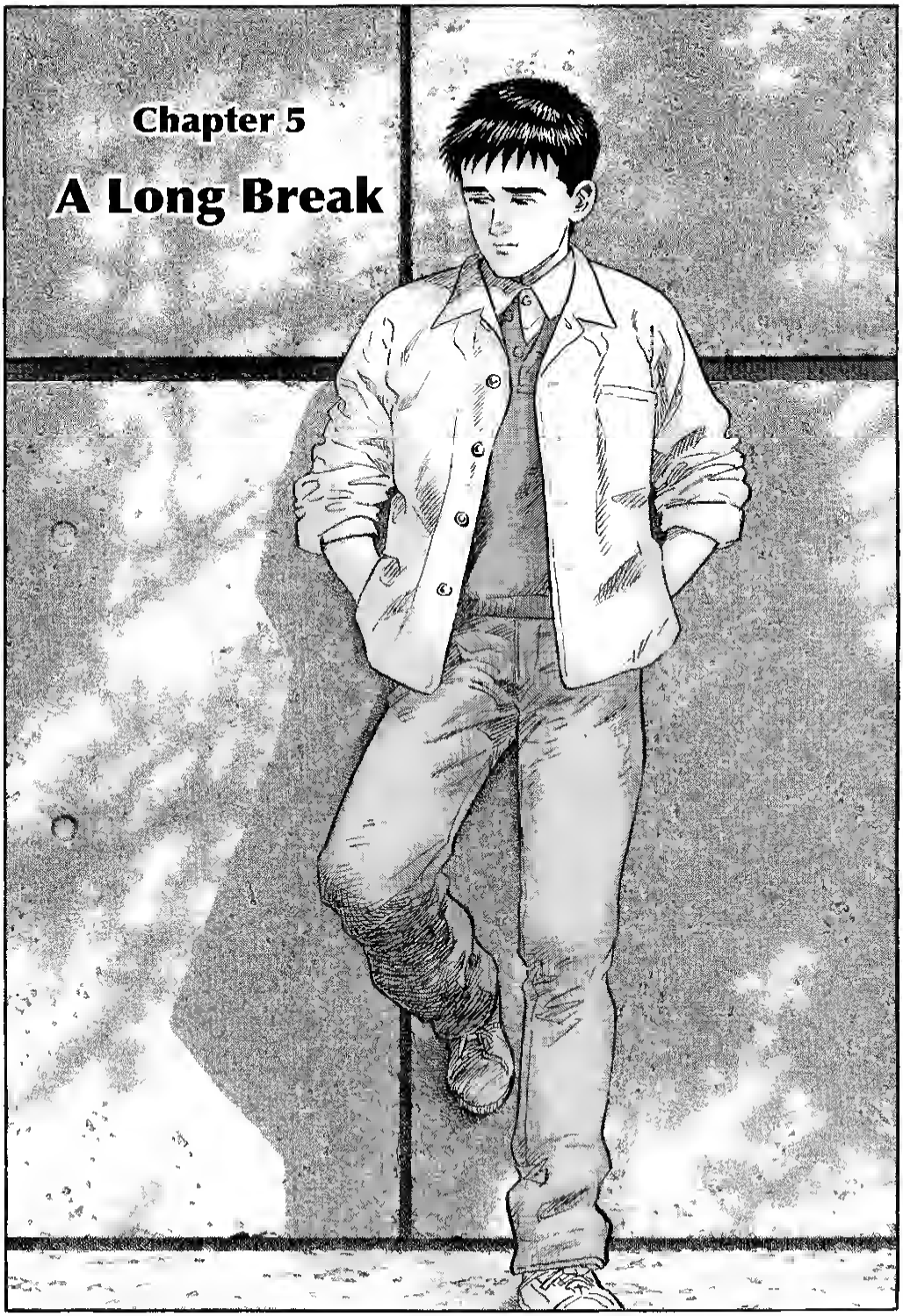
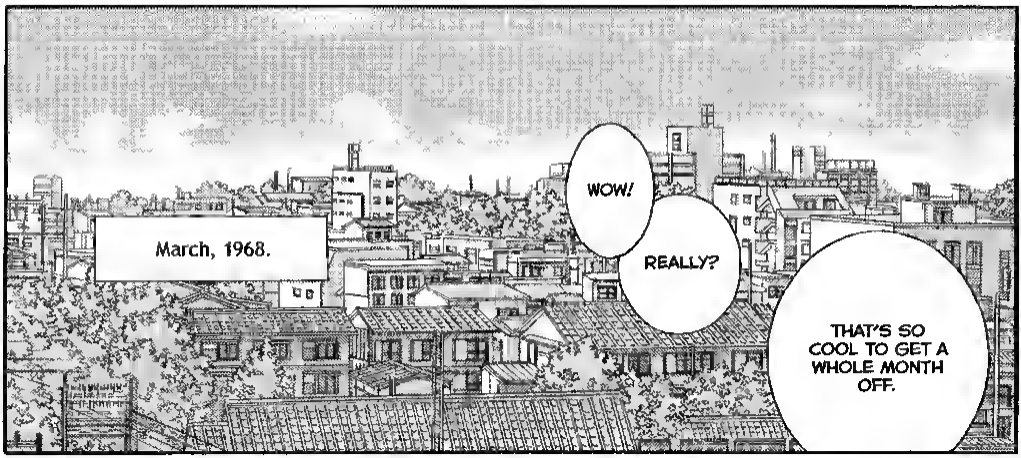
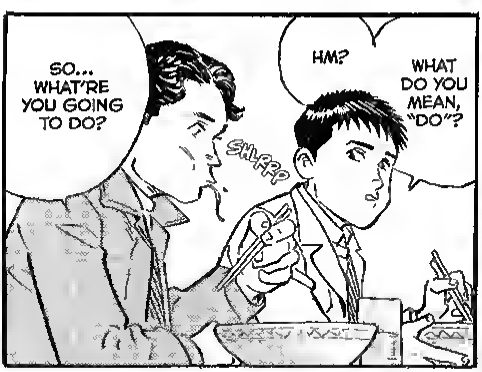
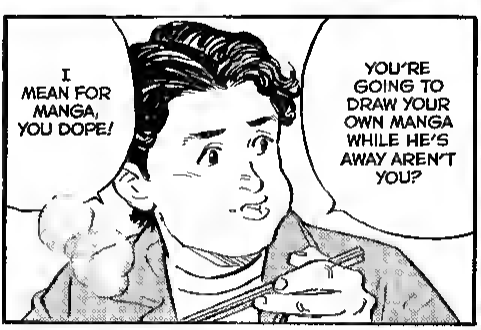

Chapter 5
A Long Break


March, 1968.
WOW!
REALLY?
THAT'S SO COOL TO GET A WHOLE MONTH OFF.

MR. KONDO'S GONE TO AMERICA FOR RESEARCH.
I WENT TO HANEDA AIRPORT EARLIER TO SEE HIM OFF.
SHLRRP
WOW.
SO MANGA ARTISTS DO RESEARCH TOO, HUH?


SO... WHAT'RE YOU GOING TO DO?
HM?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, "DO"?
SHLRRP


I MEAN FOR MANGA, YOU DOPE!
YOU'RE GOING TO DRAW YOUR OWN MANGA WHILE HE'S AWAY AREN'T YOU?

SURE.
YEAH, I WILL.
It was almost a year since I'd started working as assistant to a mangaka.

YOU GOT ANY IDEAS?
SHRRP
YEAH.
I'M THINKING ABOUT IT.
WHAT'S IT ABOUT?
ABOUT...?
HARD BOILED? LIKE "TYPHOON GORO"?
... LIKE WHAT MR. KONDO IS DOING?
IS IT GONNA BE WITH A BOY HERO...
YEAH, OF COURSE ...
..."SHONEN HOLIDAY" IS A MAGAZINE FOR YOUNG BOYS.
MFF
MFF
WHOA. "SHONEN HOLIDAY"!
SO YOU'RE AIMING FOR A DEBUT IN A MAJOR ALREADY?!
WELL...
...ACTUALLY, I HAVEN'T DONE ANYTHING YET.
SAY WHAT?
THAT'S NO GOOD, MAN!
ANYWAY.
THIS COMING SUNDAY...
...WANNA GO TO SHINJUKU? MISA'LL BE COMING TOO.
I should have been starting work on my own manga during this long break, but...

...I spent the days idly, hanging out with Tamura whenever he invited me to.
We went to the movies.
Sketched in Inokashira Park.
Visited art galleries and museums.
The second he asked me, I would go.
Then one day...
SEE YA!
YEAH, LATER!
...I went to Tamura's design school with him. Then, after hanging out in Shinjuku, as I was heading home...

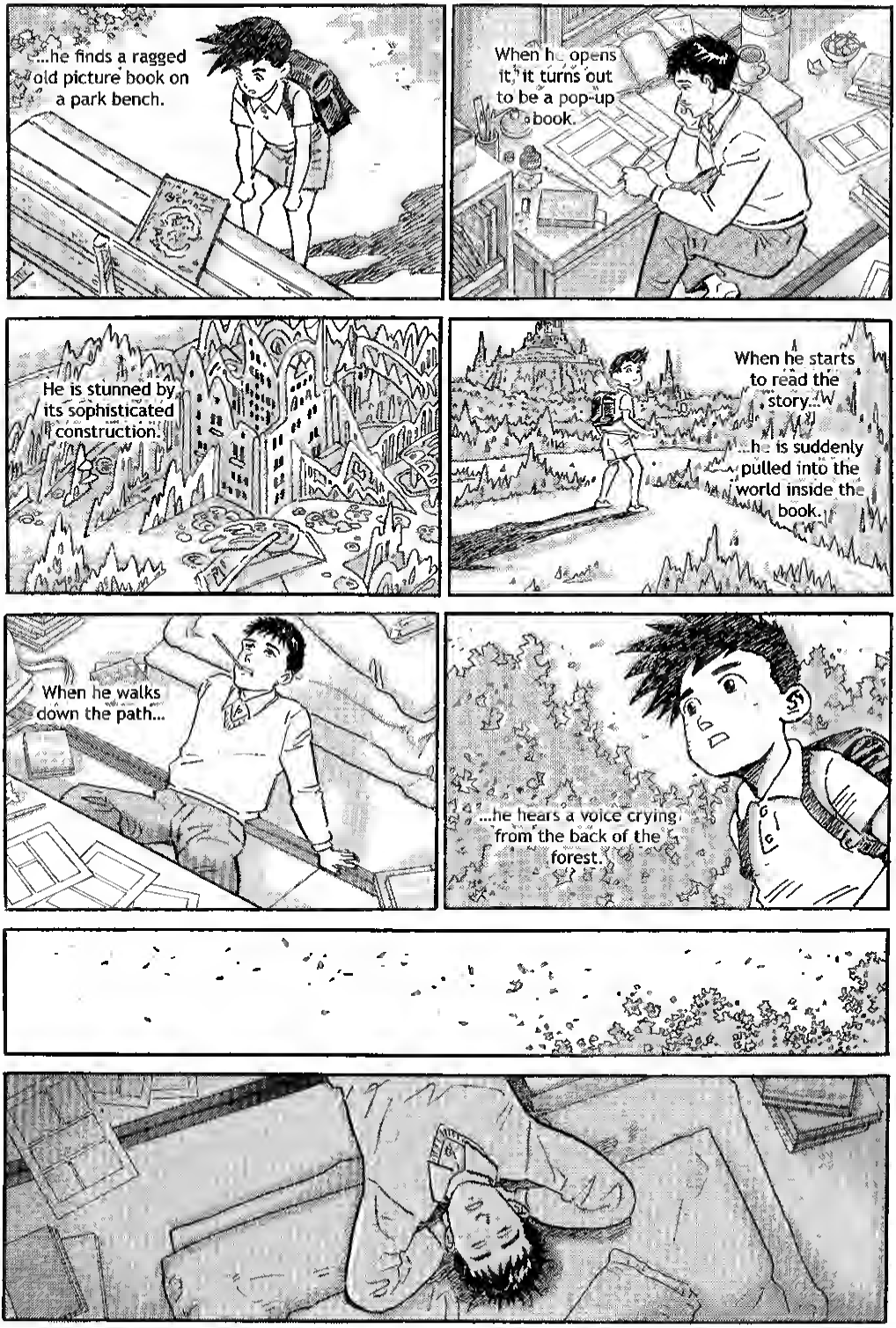
...I thought I should borrow some books to give me inspiration for a story, so I visited the studio.
OH.../
IS THERE... SOMEBODY HERE?
KCHAK
HUH?
WHAT? FUJITA?
YOU'RE WORKING!
UH HUH.
WEREN'T YOU GOING TO GO SEE A MOVIE?
MM...
...YEAH. BUT.../
WHAT THE?
THESE PAGES.
WHO DID THEM?

HAVE YOU...
...BEEN DRAWING YOUR OWN MANGA?
YEAH...
...SORT OF.
WOW, I HAD NO IDEA.
BEEN DOING IT LONG?
YEAH... BIT BY BIT, AFTER WORK.
IT'S BEEN... A YEAR NOW SINCE I STARTED.
HMM.
CAN I SEE?
IT'S NOT FINISHED YET! STOP!
IT'S FINE, JUST LET ME READ IT.
COME ON...
...I SAID STOP!
WHOA!
THIS IS GREAT STUFF!
...
IT'S...
...GOOD WORK.
REALLY...?
Fujita had been there a year longer than me, but we were the same age.

HUH. IT'S REALLY INTERESTING!
WELL...
...HERE'S THE NEXT PAGE.
MAY I?
SURE.
He told me it was his second project.
The characters resembled those of Mr. Kondo, but I was surprised it was so much better than I expected.
The story was typical hero stuff, but it was drawn so intricately that it was interesting to read.
SAY, THIS PART HERE,...
...THERE'S AN ISHINOMORI SHOTARU INFLUENCE, EH?
YEAH...
...THERE WERE LOTS. KAWASAKI NOBORU, OTHERS...!
The truth was, as I read I became filled with a sense of envy.

THIS IS REALLY GOOD.
NO.
REALLY?
AWW!
SHIT! GODDAMN IT!
DOES EVERYONE KNOW...
...THAT YOU'RE DRAWING THIS?
YEAH... MR. KONDO AND MISS TONO LOOKED AT IT FOR ME.
OH, THEY DID?
WELL, DOES... MR. MORIWAKI KNOW ABOUT IT?
I THINK...
...HE PROBABLY DOESN'T.
OH. HE'S REALLY GOING TO BE SURPRISED BY IT!
BUT IT'S NOT LIKE IT'S BEEN SELECTED TO RUN IN ANY MAGAZINE.
OH.
RIGHT.
OF COURSE NOT.
But despite all I said, I was frustrated that Fujita was one step ahead of me.

But after that...
...my appetite to create ran in pointless circles, and I passed the days lazily as usual.
I read the manga I loved over and over again.
I tried sitting at my desk, but I couldn't figure out what I ought to draw or how.
Without any other choice, I just took the plunge and tried to start drawing.
The hero was Takeshi, a "latchkey kid", bullied at school.
One day, on the way hom...


...he finds a ragged old picture book on a park bench.
When he opens it, it turns out to be a pop-up book.
He is stunned by its sophisticated construction.
When he starts to read the story...
...he is suddenly pulled into the world inside the book.
When he walks down the path...
...he hears a voice crying from the back of the forest.

FLIK
UH!
HRRNN.
OH, SORRY!
I DIDN'T MEAN TO WAKE YOU.
GH...!
HUH...? WHEN DID I...
YAAWWN
...FALL ASLEEP?
HAVE YOU BEEN DRAWING TOO, HAMA-GUCHI?
NAW, IT'S NO USE
IT'S TOO HARD SOMEHOW. I CAN'T DO IT.
UM...
...I HAVE A FAVOR TO ASK.
COULD YOU COME SOMEWHERE WITH ME?
HM?
WHERE?
TO SEE SHONEN HOLIDAY'S MISS TONO.
WOW, DID YOU FINISH YOUR STORY?
YEAH.
I CALLED HER... TO MEET TOMORROW.

The next day, I went with Fujita to the publisher in Jimbocho.
HUGAKUKAN BUILDING
He was too nervous to go alone, and couldn't submit the manuscript, he said.
I understood how he felt. I was overwhelmed by the gigantic building too.
...
DAMN, MY HEART'S RACING.
WHERE'S... ...THE FOYER?
WHOA.
WHERE DO WE GET IN?
I THINK A PLACE LIKE THIS MUST HAVE A RECEPTION AREA.
THIS LOOKS LIKE IT.

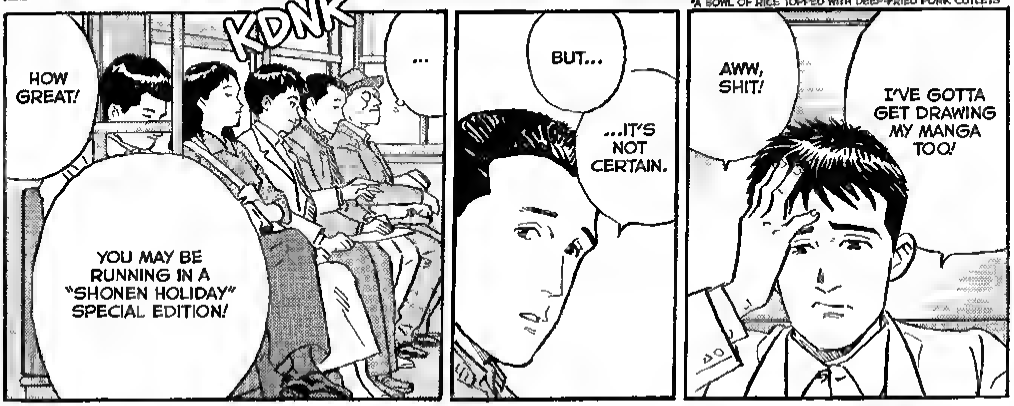
YES!
THERE! THERE IT IS!
I CAN'T. I CAN'T.
I'M TOO EMBAR-RASSED.
HAMAGUCHI, Y...YOU DO IT. GO, PLEASE.
WHAA?
WHY ME...?
COME ON, LET'S GO.
H... HOLD ON.
NOT... NOT ME.
SHOOMF
UMM...
MAY I HELP YOU?
HAMA-GUCHI!
OH!
MISS TONO!
WHAT HAPPENED? YOU'RE LATE.
WHERE'S FUJITA?
HE'S...
...JUST OUTSIDE.

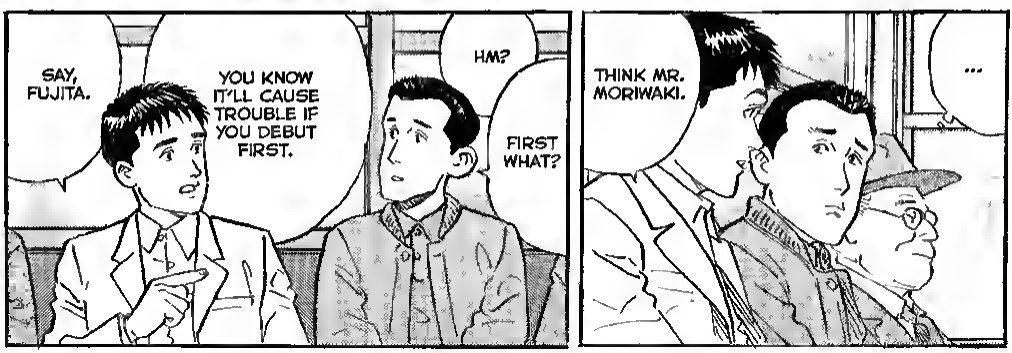
Our first time seeing an editorial office made us more and more nervous.
WHAT?
THE THUMBNAILS STILL AREN'T DONE YET?
BRRIING
BRRIING
BRRIING
YOU NUMB-SKULL!
YOU CAN'T LEAVE HIM ALONE FOR A MINUTE! GET BACK OVER THERE!
...
BRRIING
MM.
THIS IS GOOD, ISN'T IT?
Y...YOU REALLY THINK SO?
YOU'VE IMPROVED A LOT OVER LAST TIME.
THE CHARACTERS FACES ARE STILL INCONSISTENT, BUT...
... YOU'VE DRAWN IT SO THOUGHTFULLY.
IT'S VERY EASY TO READ.
BUT. THESE LAST TWO PAGES.
IT SOMEHOW FEELS LIKE YOU TRIED TO RUSH TO WRAP IT UP.
IT'S UNFORTUNATE THAT IT ENDS WITH SUCH A THUD. COULD YOU TRY FIXING THAT PART UP?
YES, MA'AM.
ALL RIGHT, COME OVER HERE.
I'LL EXPLAIN WHAT I MEAN.

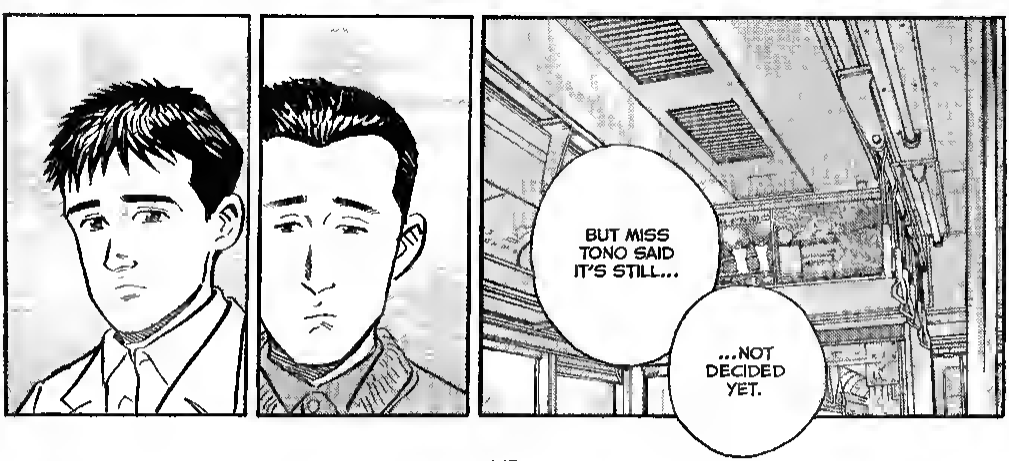
OKAY. PANEL TWO AND FOUR ON THIS PAGE.
YOU HAVE TO USE BIG PANELS THERE.
OKAY.
AND IT WOULD BE GOOD TO GIVE THE HERO AN UPSHOT IN THIS SCENE.
YES.
Somehow I was getting increasingly angry at Fujita.
Miss Tono was very attractive and for him to be getting advice from her like that...
OKAY?
IF YOU DO THAT, IT'LL COME OUT MUCH BETTER.
I SEE.
AFTER-WARDS...
...I'LL TALK WITH OUR EDITOR-IN-CHIEF.
...was vexing.
THE SPRING EXTRA EDITION MIGHT BE A POSSIBILITY.
WE'LL BE DECIDING THE TABLE OF CONTENTS SOON...
...SO YOU'D BEST GET THE CORRECTIONS DONE ASAP.
SO...
...FUJITA'S MANGA IS GOING TO RUN IN "SHONEN HOLIDAY"?
WELL...
...WE'RE ABOUT HALF WAY THERE, I SUPPOSE.

I THINK THE INDIVIDUALITY OF IT IS INTERESTING ...
...BUT THERE'S STILL AN AWKWARDNESS TO IT OVERALL, SO I CAN'T SAY ANYTHING FOR SURE.
BUT ISN'T IT INCREDIBLE! HOW GREAT FOR YOU!
YEAH.
I said these things without feeling any of it.
WELL?
HAMAGUCHI, ARE YOU DRAWING ANYTHING?
HUH?
YES.
WELL, I'M WORKING ON SOMETHING RIGHT NOW.
GREAT.
SOMETHING FOR US, HAMAGUCHI?
I'LL LOOK FORWARD TO IT.
SHOW IT TO ME WHEN IT'S DONE, OKAY?
YEAH.
SURE.
ALL RIGHT.
LET'S GET GOING.
HUH?
THE TWO OF YOU WENT TO ALL THE TROUBLE TO COME HERE...
...SO LET ME TREAT YOU TO A MEAL.

*A BOWL OF RICE TOPPED WITH DEEP-FRIED PORK CUTLETS







That evening ...
...when we got back to the studio, ...
...Fujita went straight into his corrections.
While I...
...came to a dead end trying to write my story. It wouldn't progress the way I wanted.
SCRITCH SCRITCH
KCHAC
HEY!
WHAT? SO YOU TWO ARE HERE?
WHAT ARE YOU UP TO?
MR. MORIWAKI!
WHAT'S UP?
...
OH!

I WAS JUST PASSING WHEN I SAW THE LIGHTS ON...
...SO I CAME TO HAVE A LOOK.
WELL!
YOU'RE IN A GOOD MOOD, HUH.
HAVE YOU HAD A FEW DRINKS?
YEAH, SOME.
OHH, GREAT!
YOU BOTH DRAWING?
YEAH.
SORT OF.
FUJITA MIGHT BE MAKING HIS DEBUT!
HE TOOK HIS MANUSCRIPT IN TODAY.
EH, WHAT?
AAH!
REALLY?!
WHY YOU! WHEN DID YOU FIND TIME TO DRAW IT?
WHOA.
YOU'VE GOTTEN REALLY GOOD!
HERE, LET ME SEE IT.
I'M STILL...
...DOING THE CORRECTIONS.
AND SURE ENOUGH THERE IS SOME RESEMBLANCE TO MR. KONDO'S WORK.

So Mr. Moriwaki took us out to our usual haunt "Higuma".
COME ON!
DRINK, DRINK UP!
SOMETHING UP, MR. MORIWAKI?
YUP. CONGRATS ARE IN ORDER.
OUR VERY OWN FUJITA IS GOING TO BE MAKING HIS DEBUT.
OOH!
THAT'S GREAT. CONGRATULATIONS.
BUT IT'S STILL...
...NOT DECIDED YET.
SHUSH! COME ON, DRINK! DRINK!
ARE YOU SURE?
OF COURSE! WE'RE CELEBRATING THE DEBUT OF AN APPRENTICE. IT'S MR. KONDO'S TREAT.
THERE I WAS...
...THINKING HOW UNSOCIABLE THIS GUY IS...
...AND ALL THE TIME HE'S DRAWING A MANGA.
...
GRINDING AWAY AT IT, AND ME NOT HAVING A CLUE!
SORRY.
GLP

IDIOT! WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU APOLOGIZING FOR?
WE'RE ALL WORKING, ...
...HOPING TO BE MANGAKA ONE DAY.
WE CAN'T JUST GOOF AROUND! WE'VE GOTTA BE DRAWING MANGA.
TH..
...THAT'S NOT TRUE AT ALL.
IN THE BUSINESS, YOU'RE WORTH WHAT YOU DRAW.
SENIORITY OR WHATEVER'S GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH IT.
...
WE LEARN SO MUCH FROM YOU...
...MR. MORIWAKI.
NAW.
I PUNCH WELL BELOW MY WEIGHT AGAINST YOUNGSTERS LIKE YOU WHO REALLY WORK HARD.
...
SO MANY...
...NEW MAGAZINES ARE BEING LAUNCHED LATELY.
IT'S WAY EASIER THAN BEFORE TO LAND YOUR DEBUT.

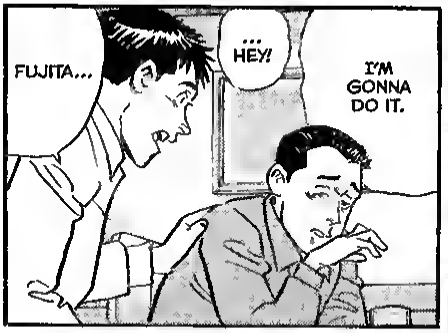
It was after that, things began to slide.
FUJITA, YOU'VE BEEN THERE WHAT, TWO YEARS, RIGHT?
ONLY TWO STORIES IN THAT TIME ISN'T MUCH.
As we drank, true feelings started to come out.
BUT...
...ISN'T IT INCREDIBLE HE'S MAKING HIS DEBUT WITH HIS SECOND STORY!
I'M SAYING...
...ANYONE CAN LAND A DEBUT.
THE PROBLEM IS KEEPING IT GOING AFTER THAT. YOU GET ME?
ANYONE CAN DRAW...
...ONE OR TWO STORIES.
THAT'S LIKE A HOBBY.
IT'S NOT MAKING A LIVING ON IT.
GLG
THIS IS JUST THE BEGINNING FOR FUJITA.
WILL A MANGA LIKE THAT BRING IN ANY MORE REAL WORK? THAT'S THE QUESTION.
HMM.

YOU KNOW...
...I RAN IN "SHONEN HOLIDAY" FOR A PERIOD TOO.
AND...
...I DEBUTED IN THE WEEKLY.
WHA?
I NEVER KNEW THAT.
SO I QUIT THE ASSISTANT JOB.
BUT IN THE END, I COULDN'T GET A SERIAL.
I DREW LOTS OF STORIES THAT YEAR, BUT THEY WERE ALL REJECTED.
BUTSU, BUTSU!
SO I CAME BACK TO WORK WITH MR. KONDO AGAIN.
GLP
URR...
...
...PLEASE DON'T LUMP ME IN WITH YOU.
HRGH
HUH?
DON'T... LUMP ME IN WITH YOU, MR. MORIWAKI.
I DON'T... PLAN ON BEING AN ASSISTANT MY WHOLE LIFE.
HAH?
WHAT DID YOU SAY TO ME?!
FUJITA!
I'M GONNA DO IT!
I'M GONNA DRAW... I'LL QUIT BEING AN ASSISTANT.

WHY YOU...!

KTAK

ME, ER...
...I'M NOT GONNA BE AN ASSISTANT UNTIL I DIE.
ARE YOU OK?!
...I...
FUJITAAA!


FUJITA...
...
HEY!
I'M GONNA DO IT.

YOU LITTLE SON-OF-A!
YOU SHOULDN'TA GOTTEN SO DRUNK!
YOU WANNA QUIT? THEN YOU CAN QUIT RIGHT NOW!!
NGH!
MR. MORIWAKI, WAIT!
HEY! NO FIGHTING IN THE BAR!
Fujita's eyes were lifeless. He was completely drunk out of his skull.
He had no idea what he was saying.

WHAP
AAH!

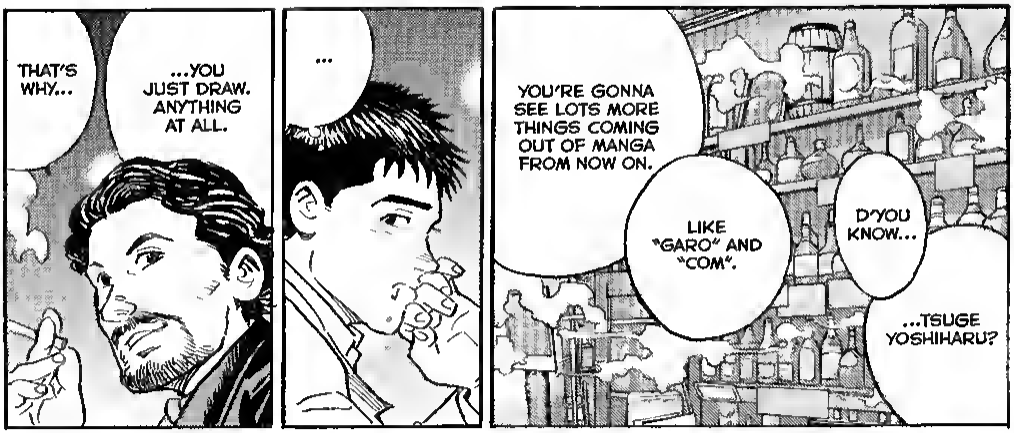
GLAK KTAK
OH!
HE HIT HIM!
AAAH!
EEK!
YEAH! FIGHT, FIGHT!

MY, MY!
THIS PLACE IS SURE LIVELY AGAIN, HUH.
OH!
WHAT'S THIS? KONDO'S APPRENTICES, EH!
WHAT'S BEEN GOING ON HERE?
MR. KIKUCHI!
FUJITA ...
...IS BLIND DRUNK.
OH, NO!
NONE OF YOU GUYS CAN HOLD YOUR LIQUOR!
SORRY 'BOUT THIS, BOSS.
MR. MORIWAKI HAS BEEN...
...ACTING VERY STRANGE TODAY.
HEY, FUJITA. CAN YOU STAND?
HNGH
HEY, HANG ON THERE, MORIWAKI.
ARE YOU LEAVING?
HEY!
WHAT'S WITH HIM?
WHAT'S HE SO SULLEN ABOUT?

My feelings were confused.
It's not like I didn't understand Monwaki's feelings...
...since I was anguishing over Fujita's debut myself, wasn't I?
KCHAK
HEY!
HOW'S FUJITA?
HE'S FINE.
HE THREW UP ON THE WAY HOME, THEN FELL OVER AND PASSED OUT.
YOU GUYS ARE A PAIN IN THE ASS!
KONDO'S APPRENTICES, HUH!
I'M REALLY SORRY.
PLEASE DON'T CAUSE ME ANY MORE TROUBLE...
...WHILE KONDO'S AWAY.
RRR.
HNN GHH.
...
MOMMA ...!

I SEE. SO THAT'S WHY MORIWAKI LOST IT, HUH?
UNDERSTANDABLE.
IT MUST HAVE BEEN PAINFUL FOR HIM.
HE HAD HIS DEBUT ONCE TOO YOU KNOW.
YEAH.
HE TOLD US.
IT'S A TOUGH LIFE. IT'S JUST CONSTANT DRAWING, DRAWING.
I'VE HAD EXPERIENCE WITH MANGA TOO.
MANGA IS HIS LIVING.
HE SPENT ABOUT SIX MONTHS DRAWING HIS OWN MANGA WHILE DOING SPOT ILLOS FOR KONDO.
BUT HE QUIT AND CAME BACK TO MR. KONDO, RIGHT?
UH HUH.
KONDO WAS IN TROUBLE TOO WITHOUT MORIWAKI.
KONDO CAN ONLY DO WHAT HE DOES BECAUSE HE HAS MORIWAKI.
FHH
...
NEITHER OF THEM WOULD EVER SAY ANYTHING...
...BUT EVERYONE KNOWS IT'S THE CASE.

IT MAY SEEM RIDICULOUS, BUT...
...IF KONDO DIDN'T HAVE MORIWAKI RIGHT NOW, HE PROBABLY COULDN'T DO HIS JOB.
HM?
THAT'S HOW MUCH HE DEPENDS ON HIM.
KONDO RELIES ON HIM.
...
SOMEHOW, I THINK I KIND OF UNDERSTAND.
BY THE WAY, KID...
...ARE YOU DRAWING A MANGA?
MM.
I'M JUST... THINKING ABOUT IT RIGHT NOW.
YOU HALFWIT!
THINKING ABOUT IT DOESN'T MAKE A DRAWING!
I DON'T KNOW...
...WHAT IT IS I ACTUALLY WANT TO DRAW.
BU HA HA!
THAT'S IT! SUFFER, SUFFER!
THAT'S HOW EVERYBODY STRUGGLES AND FLOUNDERS WHILE THEY MATURE!
WHAP!
HFF!


THAT'S WHY...
...YOU JUST DRAW. ANYTHING AT ALL.
...
YOU'RE GONNA SEE LOTS MORE THINGS COMING OUT OF MANGA FROM NOW ON.
LIKE "GARO" AND "COM".
D'YOU KNOW...
...TSUGE YOSHIHARU?

* "SCREW STYLE" TRANSLATED AND PUBLISHED IN THE 250TH EDITION OF THE COMICS JOURNAL

IT WAS TURNED DOWN...
HUH?
WHY?
WHAT HAPPENED ...?
WELL...
...IT HAD TOO MANY PAGES, APPARENTLY...
...SO THEY CAN'T RUN IT IN THE SPRING SPECIAL, THEY SAID.
HANG ON!
WASN'T IT MISS TONO WHO TOLD YOU TO INCREASE THE PAGE COUNT?!
AND...
...SHE SAID THE CHARACTERS ARE STILL WEAK.
...
I SEE.
In the end, Fujita's manga was never published.
HOW COULD YOU DO THAT?
YOU WENT AND TOLD EVERYONE TOO SOON.
GTAK
...
I'M SO SORRY.

Just over two weeks later...
...I'd run out of money to go out and have fun,...
...so I shut myself up in my room, and began drawing, bewildered the whole time
HAHH
WHAT THE HELL AM I DOING?
Ultimately, I wasn't able to complete a single story.
WILL I...
...EVER BE ABLE TO DRAW MANGA?
Whilst in this frame of mind my long break ended.

Right at the start of May, Mr. Kondo returned from his research trip to America.
HEY.
HAMA-GUCHI!
COULD YOU... ORGANIZE THESE PHOTOS I TOOK?
Right away he began work on a new serial for "Shonen Holiday".
HERE, MISS TONO.
THE TWO-TONE WORK IS DONE.
OKAY.
JUST SIXTEEN PAGES LEFT THEN.
Within a few days, the studio was back to its usual pace as if nothing at all had happened.
HEY, FUJITA,...
...DO THIS PAGE PLEASE.
OKAY.
USE THIS PHOTO FOR REFERENCE.

Chapter 6
Wishing
on a Star

July, 1968.
It was already a year-and-a-half since I'd started working as an assistant to a mangaka.
AW...
...HOW SHOULD I DO THIS?
I still hadn't drawn a single project of my own.
UGH!
THIS IS SO HARD!
After work that day, once again, I had stayed behind in the studio by myself.

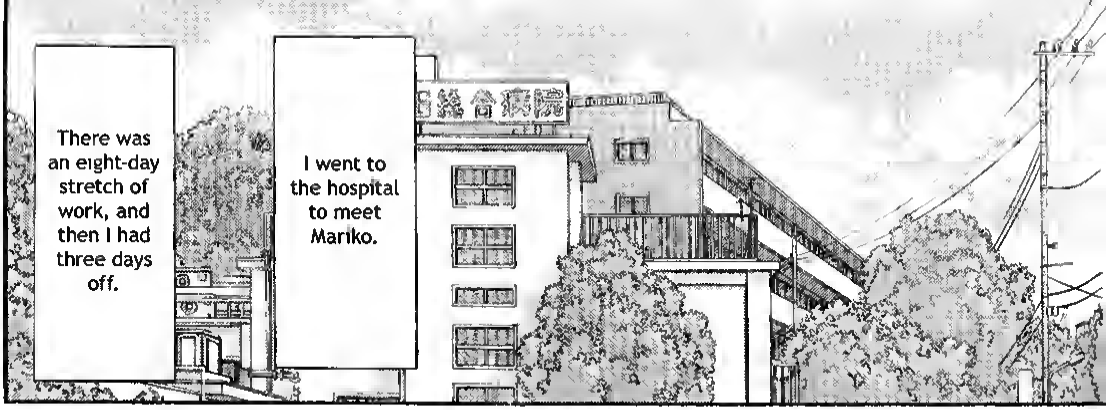
HAAH
I CAN'T COME UP WITH A STORY...
...AND I'M SO HUNGRY.
RIIING
HM?
HMMPH!
GONE TWELVE ALREADY?
GAAH!
SCRITCH SCRATCH
IT'S NO USE!
RIIING
WHO COULD THAT BE?
HELLO, THIS IS KONDO PRODUCTIONS.
MISTER KONDO ISN'T HERE.
HUH?
OH, IS THAT YOU, MR. KIKUCHI?
YEAH, EVERYONE'S GONE HOME.
WHAT?!
YES, THAT'D BE FINE.
I WAS JUST THINKING ABOUT GETTING SOMETHING TO EAT.
LET'S DO IT!
That was the call that started everything.

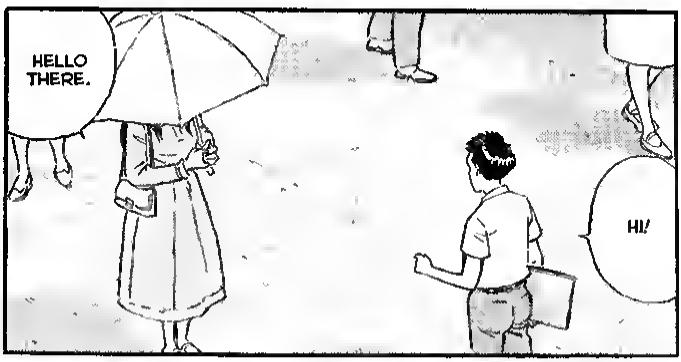
It was "Higuma" our usual hangout.
HELLO!
WELCOME!
OH...
YO!
HELLO ...
...YOU LOOKED AFTER ME THAT TIME.
SORRY FOR THAT...AND THANKS.
LONG TIME NO SEE. I'M GLAD YOU REMEMBER ME.
HAHAHA! GREAT, GREAT!
I'VE GOT NO MEMORY OF IT AT ALL. SORRY.
AS ALWAYS.
TETSU CAN NEVER REMEMBER ANYTHING.
YOU DON'T REMEMBER TAKING ME ROUND WHEN I WAS DRUNK...?
NOPE.
IT WASN'T OLD TIMES!
ENOUGH ABOUT OLD TIMES. HERE, HAVE A SEAT KID.

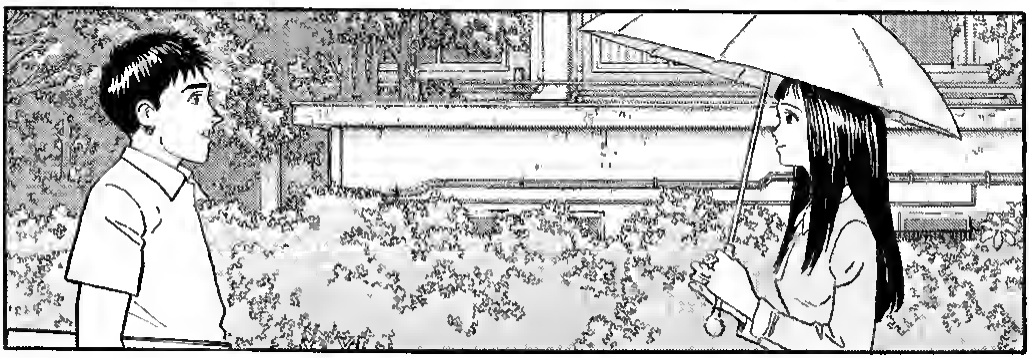
BAR-TENDER!
ONE MORE BEER!
AND...
...COULD YOU MAKE US A FRIED RICE SPECIAL?
OH!
SORRY.
LET ME INTRODUCE YOU. THIS IS MY KID SISTER.
GOOD EVENING.
I'M MARIKO.
OH...
HAMAGUCHI. PLEASED.
SHE GOT TRANSFERRED TO A HOSPITAL NEAR HERE A SHORT WHILE BACK.
HUH...?
SHE'S HAD A WEAK CONSTITUTION EVER SINCE SHE WAS LITTLE.
SHE'S UNWELL ALL THE TIME.
IS THE HOSPITAL OKAY...
...ABOUT YOU BEING OUT THIS LATE?
IT'S FINE. SHE DOESN'T NEED ABSOLUTE REST...
...AND IT WOULD BE SO SAD IF SHE HAD TO STAY IN THE HOSPITAL ALL THE TIME.
SISTER... PLEASE.
STOP WORRYING.
IT'S JUST THE TRUTH.

THAT'S WHY ...
...I BRING HER OUT LIKE THIS SOMETIMES.
ALL THE GIRL DOES IS READ BOOKS IN HER ROOM ALL THE TIME.
THERE'S SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL ABOUT IT!
A LITERATE GIRL LIKE MARI.
IT'S FINE, I LOVE READING.
HEY, DID YOU HEAR THAT, KID?
YOU LIKE READING?
YES.
I READ OFTEN.
RECENTLY ...
...JACK LONDON AND SETON... AND TOGAWA YUKIO.*
THE HELL'S THAT?
THAT'S WAY TOO FRINGE, MAN.
*JAPANESE NOVELIST (1912 - 2004) SAID TO BE THE FATHER OF ANIMAL STORIES.
UMM...
...TOGAWA YUKIO'S "KOYASU-INU MONOGATARI".*
I READ THAT.
OH, REALLY?
SEE?
I'M NOT THE ONLY ONE!
**THE TALE OF KOYASU DOG" ABOUT AN ENDANGERED BREED
HAHA!
YOU CAN HAVE DISCUSSIONS THEN, EH?
THAT'S GREAT, KID.
HUH?
I HAVE A FAVOR TO ASK YOU, HAMAGUCHI.

COULD YOU TAKE MARI ON OUTINGS FROM THE HOSPITAL FROM TIME TO TIME?
BUT.../
IT'LL BE GREAT! EVEN THE DOCTOR SAYS SO, AS LONG AS YOU DON'T OVERDO IT!
YOU HEAR? NOTHING TOO TIRING, KID.
OKAY... I WILL!
MARI...
...YOU'RE STILL YOUNG.
I WANT YOU TOO SEE AND EXPERIENCE A LOT MORE THINGS.
She was eighteen.
HMPF
...HAMAGUCHI!
THANKS SO MUCH...
She'd taken a year off school so she was still in 12th grade.
She was a year younger than me.

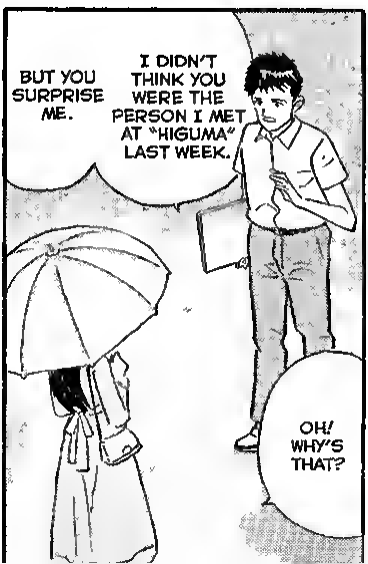

There was an eight-day stretch of work, and then I had three days off.
I went to the hospital to meet Mariko.


HELLO THERE.
HI!

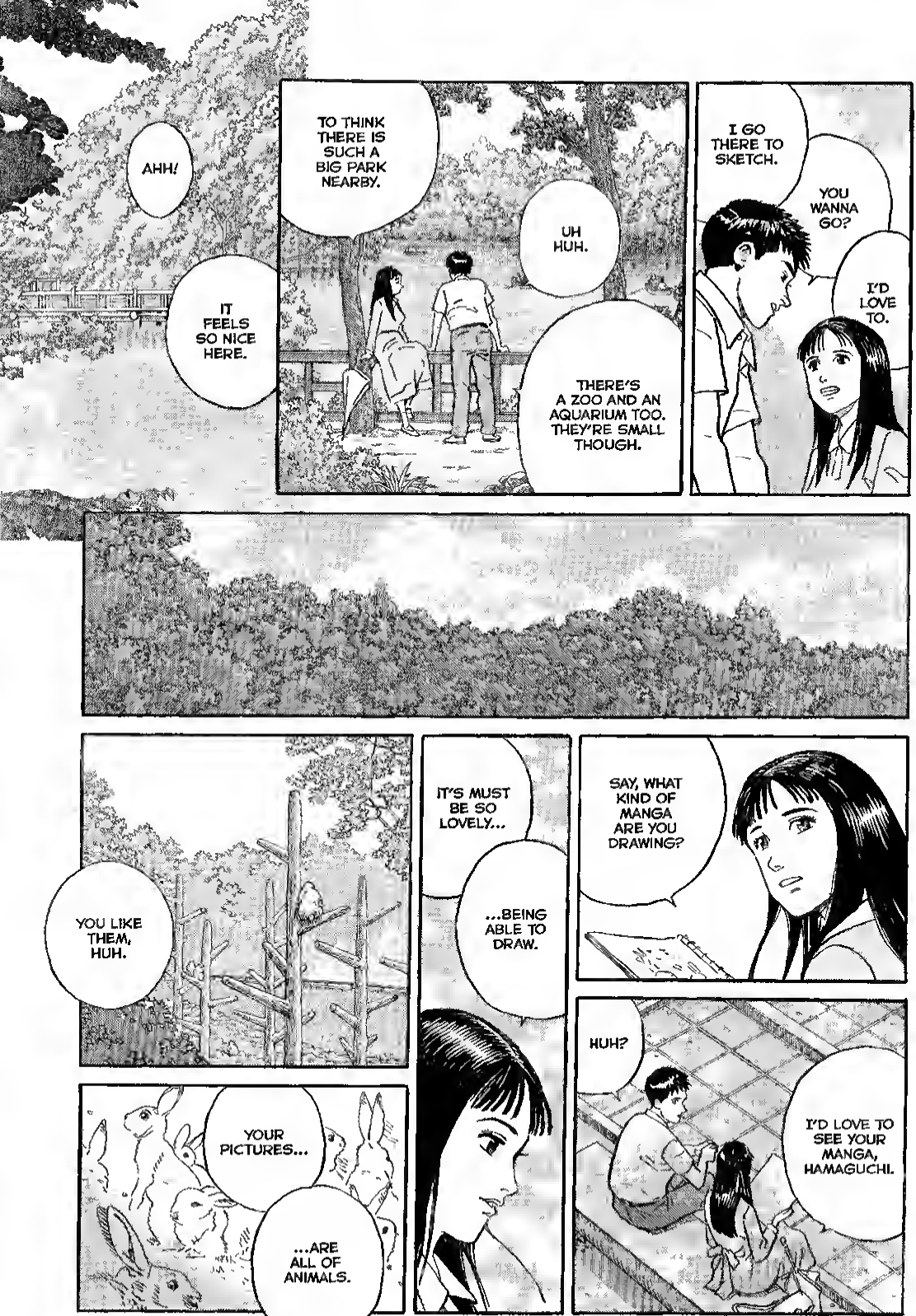


I'M SORRY ...
...THAT MY SISTER SO RUDELY ASKED YOU TO DO THIS.
NO. IT'S FINE.

THEN I'M GLAD.


BUT YOU SURPRISE ME.
I DIDN'T THINK YOU WERE THE PERSON I MET AT "HIGUMA" LAST WEEK.
OH! WHY'S THAT?

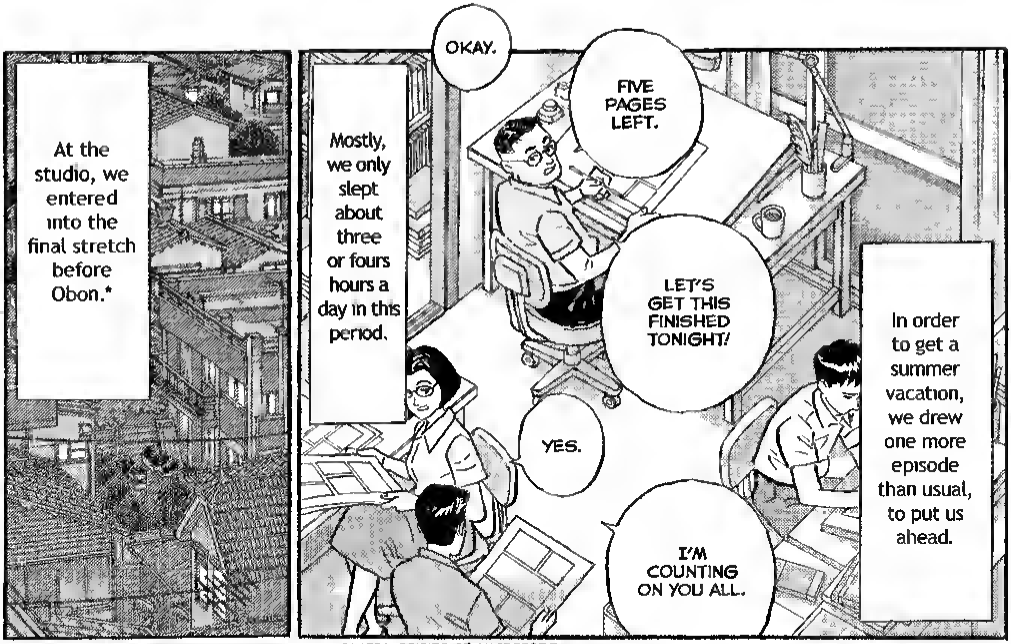
WELL, YOU LOOK SO PALE NOW.
YES, TRUE.
I'M NOT ALLOWED TO GET TOO MUCH SUN.
I GET A FEVER IF I TAN, EVEN A LITTLE.
SO I WEAR LONG SLEEVES, EVEN IN SUMMER.
WEIRD, ISN'T IT?
THE TRUTH IS, I'D LOVE...
...TO GO TO THE SEA AND TRY SWIMMING.
I wasn't sure how to respond.
BRRRRM
WOULD YOU CALL THIS A DATE?
IT'S MY FIRST.
HAMAGUCHI, DO YOU HAVE A GIRLFRIEND?
ER... NO, NOT AT ALL...!
REALLY?
THAT'S GOOD.


AHH!
IT FEELS SO NICE HERE.
TO THINK THERE IS SUCH A BIG PARK NEARBY.
UH HUH.
THERE'S A ZOO AND AN AQUARIUM TOO. THEY'RE SMALL THOUGH.
I GO THERE TO SKETCH.
YOU WANNA GO?
I'D LOVE TO.
YOU LIKE THEM, HUH.
YOUR PICTURES...
...ARE ALL OF ANIMALS.
IT'S MUST BE SO LOVELY...
...BEING ABLE TO DRAW.
SAY, WHAT KIND OF MANGA ARE YOU DRAWING?
HUH?
I'D LOVE TO SEE YOUR MANGA, HAMAGUCHI.

RHSS
RHSS
RHSS
I CAN'T DO IT.
WHY NOT?
I'VE HIT A BRICK WALL WITH THE STORY.
IT'S STILL ONLY PART WAY DONE.
WHAT'S IT ABOUT?
ABOUT...?
WELL, IT'S A FANTASY, I GUESS.
I'D LIKE TO READ IT. SHOW IT TO ME, OKAY!
AND I BET ANIMALS SHOW UP IN IT, RIGHT?
HUH?
ANIMALS?
OHH!
RIGHT, ANIMALS, SURE.
ISN'T THERE SOMETHING I CAN DO?
LIKE, WE COULD THINK UP THE STORY TOGETHER MAYBE.
YEAH.
SURE, THAT MIGHT BE GOOD.
OH, I'M SO HAPPY!
NOW, TELL ME WHAT THE STORY'S ABOUT.
I had no choice but to tell her the story, though it was still only part finished.

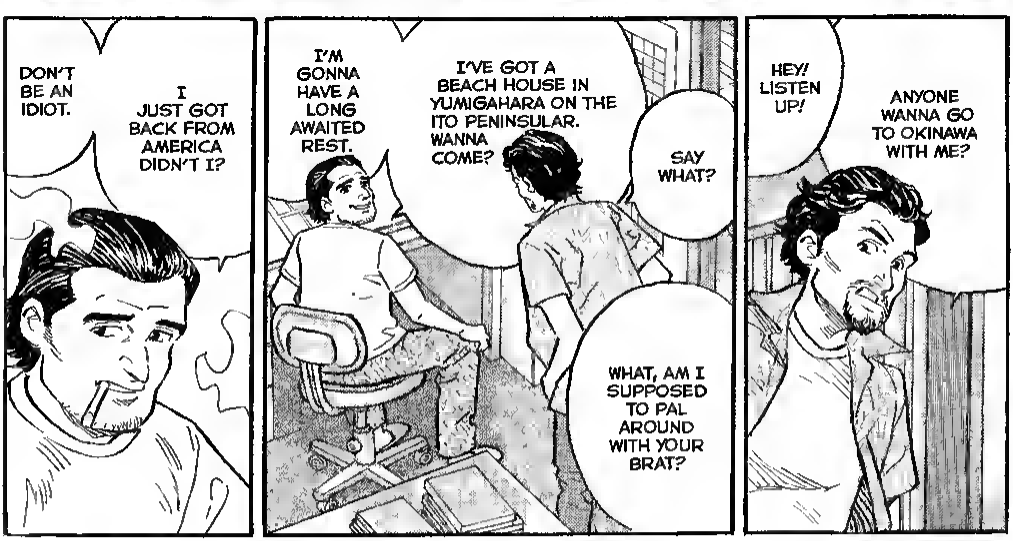
The story was about the latchkey kid Takeshi who gets lost inside the world of a pop-up picture book.
HMM.
I THINK IT'S INTERESTING.
BUT HOW DOES HE RESCUE THE GIRL FROM THE CASTLE?
I HAVEN'T FIGURED IT OUT YET.
WELL, THEN...
...BRING SOME ANIMALS INTO IT. YOU CAN MAKE ANIMALS THAT UNDERSTAND SPEECH INTO HIS ALLIES.
LIKE A DOG AND A BEAR.
OR BIRDS. HOW ABOUT THAT?
IT'S NOT THAT WEIRD FOR A PICTURE BOOK KINGDOM.
THERE COULD EVEN BE AN EVIL SORCERER.
OOH!
THIS IS GETTING FUN!
I had never thought it, but with her encouragement I was going to complete the manga.
I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE IT! SHOW ME NOW!!

After that, even when my friend Tamura invited me to hang out, I turned him down.
I CAN'T.
I'VE GOT THINGS TO DO.
WHAT?!
YOU'VE GOTTEN SO ANTISOCIAL.
I'M BUSY WITH WORK.
REALLY...? IS THAT ALL?
YOU'VE BEEN AWFULLY INTO YOUR MANGA LATELY.
YEAH.
WELL, YOU TOLD ME YOURSELF.
YOU SAID I SHOULD DRAW MY OWN MANGA.
WELL, YEAH, I DID, BUT...
...THERE MUST BE SOME OTHER REASON TOO, RIGHT?
THERE ISN'T.
IT'S GONNA BE TWO YEARS SOON, AND I HAVEN'T DRAWN A SINGLE STORY. IT'S PATHETIC, ISN'T IT?
HMM.
I SEE.
WELL... IT DOESN'T BOTHER ME ANY.
THPP THPP
PHEW!
SO HOT!
WHATEVER THE REASON,...
...YOU DRAWING MANGA IS A GOOD THING.


At the studio, we entered into the final stretch before Obon.*
Mostly, we only slept about three or fours hours a day in this period.
OKAY.
FIVE PAGES LEFT.
LET'S GET THIS FINISHED TONIGHT!
YES.
I'M COUNTING ON YOU ALL.
In order to get a summer vacation, we drew one more episode than usual, to put us ahead.

*A SUMMER BUDDIST FESTIVAL HONORING THE DEPARTED SPIRITS OF ANCESTORS.

MUST BE NICE...
...TAKING TEN DAYS OFF. WHERE ARE YOU GONNA GO, KONDO?
NOT GOING ANYWHERE.
FAMILY TIME.
HEH HEH. LIAR! YOU'RE ACTUALLY GOING TO HAWAII WITH SOME SKIRT, AREN'T YOU?

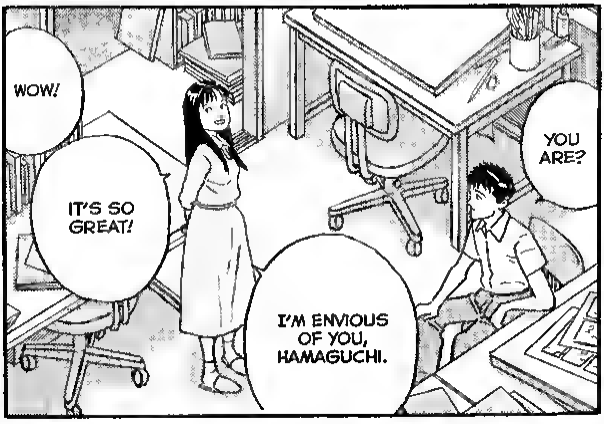

DON'T BE AN IDIOT.
I JUST GOT BACK FROM AMERICA DIDN'T I?
I'M GONNA HAVE A LONG AWAITED REST.
I'VE GOT A BEACH HOUSE IN YUMIGAHARA ON THE ITO PENINSULAR. WANNA COME?
SAY WHAT?
WHAT, AM I SUPPOSED TO PAL AROUND WITH YOUR BRAT?
HEY! LISTEN UP!
ANYONE WANNA GO TO OKINAWA WITH ME?

EH, TONO? HOW ABOUT YOU?
YOU'VE GOT A SUMMER HOLIDAY, RIGHT?
YES. I'M GOING BACK TO VISIT MY HOME TOWN.
YOUR HOME TOWN?
WHERE'S THAT?
MIYA-ZAKI.
OH, KYUSHU, EH?
PERFECT. IT'S CLOSE TO OKI-NAWA.
SHALL I COME BY?
STOP, PLEASE!
HEH HEH.
I'M NOT POPULAR AROUND HERE.
MORIWAKI.
DON'T LOOK AT ME.
HEY, HOW'S IT GOING? I HEAR YOU'RE DRAWING A MANGA.
YUP.
AND THAT YOU TOOK HER OUT.
YEAH.
WELL...!
HER BIG SISTER WAS REALLY HAPPY.
KEEP IT GOING FOR US...
...OKAY, KID!
SURE.

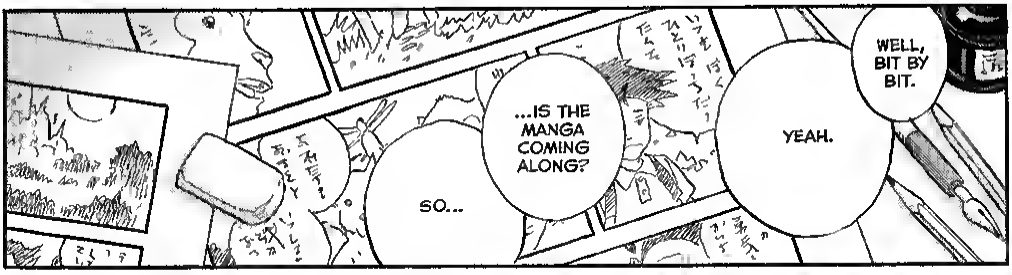
Sometimes they didn't let her leave the hospital grounds...
...but, following that first time, we met more and more.
I'M STILL NOT SURE HOW TO END IT.
IT'S DIFFICULT.
I THINK THE STORY'S GOTTEN REALLY INTERESTING!
AFTER HE SAVES THE GIRL INSIDE THE PICTURE BOOK...
...IS IT BETTER THAT IT'S NO LONGER A DREAM?
MM. WELL, AFTER HE RETURNS TO THE REAL WORLD...
...THE GIRL IS WAITING IN THE PARK WHERE HE FOUND THE BOOK!
YEAH.
IT'S SO LOVELY!
IT'S GREAT. I FEEL LIKE IT'S GOING TO BE A MASTERPIECE.
IT'S THEN SHE UNDERSTANDS IT WAS TAKESHI WHO RESCUED HER!
OH!
THINK SO?

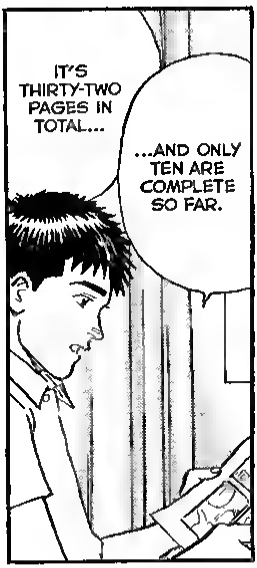
HEH. IT SEEMS KIND OF STRANGE...
...BUT THE GIRL IN THIS STORY REMINDS ME OF ME.
SO AM I...
...THE BOY THAT COMES TO SAVE HER?
AHAHAHA! I WONDER IF IT'LL REALLY HOLD UP?
YOU'VE GOTTA FINISH IT NO MATTER WHAT!
I GUARANTEE IT.
OH, IT WILL.
YOU CAN'T ABANDON IT HALF WAY THROUGH! NO WAY!
I WON'T.
Soon I found I couldn't wait to see her again.

Then, one day...
...she told me she wanted to see the studio.


WOW!
IT'S SO GREAT!
YOU ARE?
I'M ENVIOUS OF YOU, HAMAGUCHI.

YOU GET TO DO A JOB YOU LOVE...
...AND THERE ARE SO MANY BOOKS. INCREDIBLE.


SO...
...IS THE MANGA COMING ALONG?
YEAH.
WELL, BIT BY BIT.


IT'S THIRTY-TWO PAGES IN TOTAL...
...AND ONLY TEN ARE COMPLETE SO FAR.

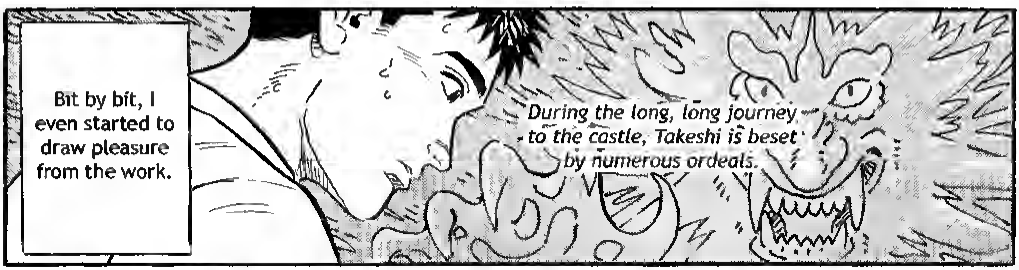
HOW MUCH LONGER WILL IT TAKE?
HMM.
I ONLY HAVE TIME TO DRAW WHEN I'M NOT WORKING.
SO IT'LL STILL TAKE SOME MONTHS.

I SEE.
I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE IT FINISHED!

She was late returning so I saw her all the way back to the hospital.
BRRRM
I'M SORRY YOU HAD TO COME SO FAR.
PLUS IT'S A TWENTY-MINUTE WAIT FOR THE BUS BACK.
THAT'S NOT SO BAD.
I...
...I'LL WAIT HERE WITH YOU!
MAY I?
HMM?
WELL, SURE.
I KNOW THAT YOU SPEND TIME WITH ME BECAUSE MY SISTER ASKED YOU TO,...
...BUT YOU FEEL LIKE A REAL FRIEND HAMAGUCHI ...
...AND...
...I HAVE A REALLY FUN TIME WHEN YOU'RE AROUND.
WH...WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
THAT BOTHERED YOU? BUT I FEEL THE SAME WAY.
...
FIRST TIME WAS BECAUSE MR. KIKUCHI ASKED ME TO SPEND TIME WITH YOU...
...BUT NOW IT'S DIFFERENT! TRULY!

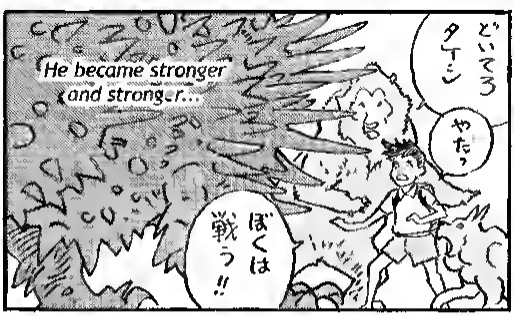
THAT'S WHY I'M DRAWING THE MANGA.
IT'S FOR YOU.
AHA-HAHA!
RHSS RHSSSS
I'M SO HAPPY!
Her body, when I embraced her, was far more gaunt even than it looked, and so fragile it saddened me.
I LOVE YOU.

After that, whenever I had free time, I worked on the manga.

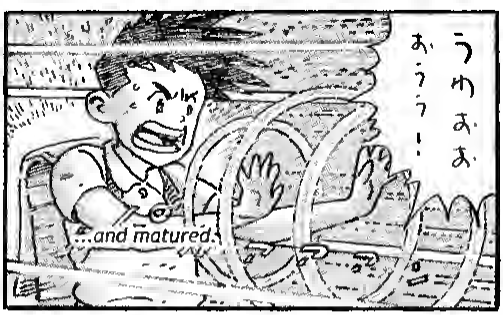


Bit by bit, I even started to draw pleasure from the work.

During the long, long journey to the castle, Takeshi is beset by numerous ordeals.

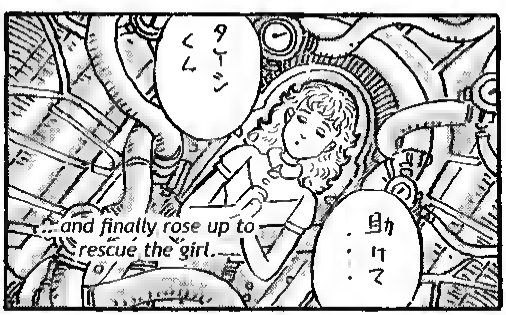


He became stronger and stronger...



...and matured.

He gained more and more friends...



...and finally rose up to rescue the girl.

He fought the demon king.

The desire to show Mariko the manga became the driving force behind my drawing it.

It was an extremely hot day in the height of summer.
I GOT PERMISSION FROM THE DOCTOR FOR AN OUTING. IT'S FINE!
GREAT!
BUT ISN'T SHINJUKU A BIT TOO FAR?
YES, BUT...
...IT'LL BE A GRAND ADVENTURE FOR ME!
THIS HEAT! PHEW!
FOR GOODNESS SAKE!
WHERE SHOULD WE GO?
I GUESS A MOVIE WOULD BE BEST, HUH?
TERRIFIC. IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE I SAW A MOVIE.
...AS LONG AS YOU REALLY WANT TO SEE IT.
THAT'S FINE HAMAGUCHI,...
GOOD.
LET'S GO.
WHAT SHOULD WE SEE?
HOW ABOUT "2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY"?
I HEAR IT'S AMAZING.
So we went to the Milano-za Theater in Shinjuku.

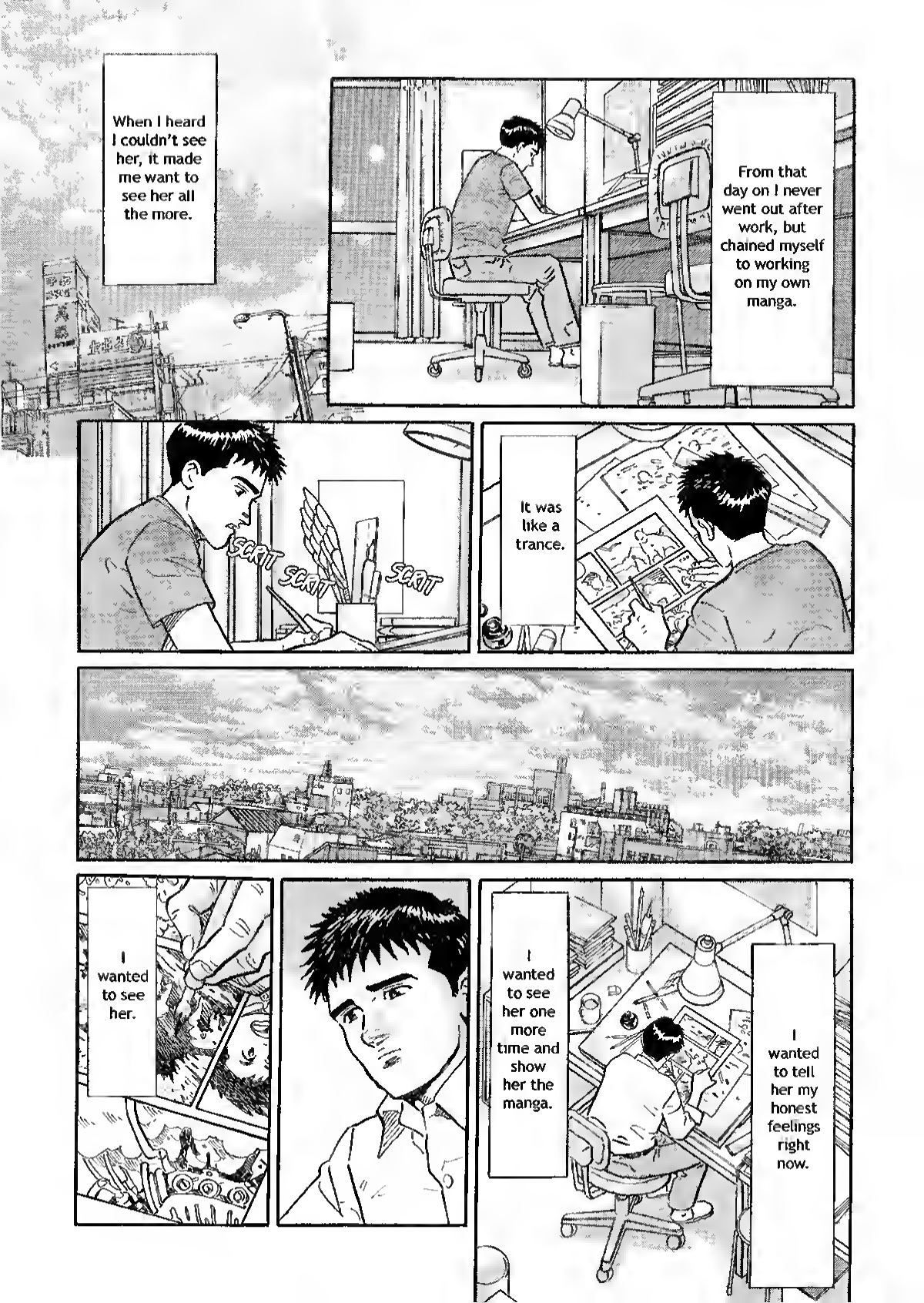
MILANO
BOY, THAT WAS LONG.
MM... I DIDN'T REALLY UNDERSTAND IT ALL.
I'M A BIT TIRED NOW.
OKAY.
SHALL WE HEAD BACK?
NO I'LL BE FINE.
JUST NEED A LITTLE REST.
WHEW.
I'M SORRY.
...
MY BODY'S... SO WEAK.
YOU MUST HATE IT... THAT I'M LIKE THIS.
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT! IF I HATED IT, I WOULDN'T SPEND TIME WITH YOU.
YOU SHOULDN'T OVERDO IT.
YOU'RE SICK AFTER ALL.
YEAH.

Afterwards, we had a meal at a restaurant I knew.
OH, WOW!
IT LOOKS SO YUMMY!
THIS PLACE IS FAMOUS FOR THE CABBAGE ROLLS.
MM! TASTY! BUT I CAN'T EAT ALL OF THIS.
THAT'S FINE. LEAVE IT.
I'LL FINISH IT.
I'M GLAD IT WON'T BE WASTED 'COS IT'S...
...A REAL TREAT.
HAAAAANK
ARE YOU WORKING ON...
...THE MANGA?
YES.
COME TO THE STUDIO AGAIN.
IS IT REALLY OKAY?
She looked tired. Maybe it was because of the outing.

Just as we arrived at the station, a heavy downpour started and we couldn't even walk to the bus stop.
IT'S INCREDIBLE.
IT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE IT'LL STOP ANYTIME SOON.
YOU'LL BE LATE GETTING BACK.
WON'T THE DOCTOR SCOLD YOU?
IT'S FINE.
WHAT, WITH THE RAIN LIKE THIS I MEAN...
...NOW I CAN STAY WITH YOU, HAMAGUCHI.
HEE HEE!
HAHA-HA!
THANK YOU.
TODAY WAS REALLY FUN.
HANG IN THERE WITH THE MANGA. I WON'T GET IN YOUR WAY ANYMORE.
HUH...?
THIS RAIN...
...I WOULD LOVE IT TO JUST KEEP ON LIKE THIS.
Somehow... our parting was different than usual.

Starting the next day, we worked nonstop for four days
GOOD.
ONLY THE FINISHES TO GO.
SIXTEEN PAGES LEFT, RIGHT?
BRRING
BRRING
HEY.
HAMAGUCHI, GET THE PHONE.
BRRING
OKAY.
HELLO?
YES, THAT'S RIGHT.
YES, THIS IS HAMAGUCHI.
OH... HER SISTER?
YES.
OH... A REST FOR A WHILE?
YES...
...IS THAT SO?
IT'S BECAUSE SHE OVERDID IT THE OTHER DAY, ISN'T IT?
I'M SORRY. PLEASE APOLOGIZE FOR ME.

OH... I SEE. OF COURSE.
CAN I VISIT HER...?
KCHAK!
WHAT'S UP?
IS ANYTHING WRONG?
NO.
IT'S...
Her condition had apparently taken a turn for the worse after that day.
She didn't want to be seen in her state either, so she was refusing visits.
...THE GIRL MR. KIKUCHI ASKED ME TO SPEND TIME WITH.
HER CONDITION HAS WORSENED ...
...AND SHE'S MORE FRAIL THAN USUAL.
She wanted to tell me that she'd had fun on our date that day.
That she couldn't wait to see my manga.
That she wanted to see me the moment it was done.
That she would concentrate on recovering until then.


When I heard I couldn't see her, it made me want to see her all the more.
From that day on I never went out after work, but chained myself to working on my own manga.
SCRIT SCRIT SCRIT
It was like a trance.
I wanted to see her.
I wanted to see her one more time and show her the manga.
I wanted to tell her my honest feelings right now.

YOU'RE SO KEEN!
ARE YOU STAYING BEHIND TO WORK AGAIN TONIGHT?
YES.
I MUST.
JUST TWO PAGES LEFT.
WOW.
THAT'S GREAT.
I WAS HOPING TO FINISH IT THIS COMING BREAK.
HAVE YOU SHOWN THIS TO MISS TONO?
NO.
IT'S STILL SO INEPT. I COULDN'T SHOW THIS TO HER.
I WONDER. I THINK IT'S PRETTY GOOD.
SHE MAY GIVE YOU SOME GRIEF ABOUT THE PAGE COUNT AGAIN THOUGH.
I THINK YOU OUGHT TO SHOW HER.
YOU'VE DONE ALL THAT WORK.
YEAH. S'POSE.
SCRIT SCRIT

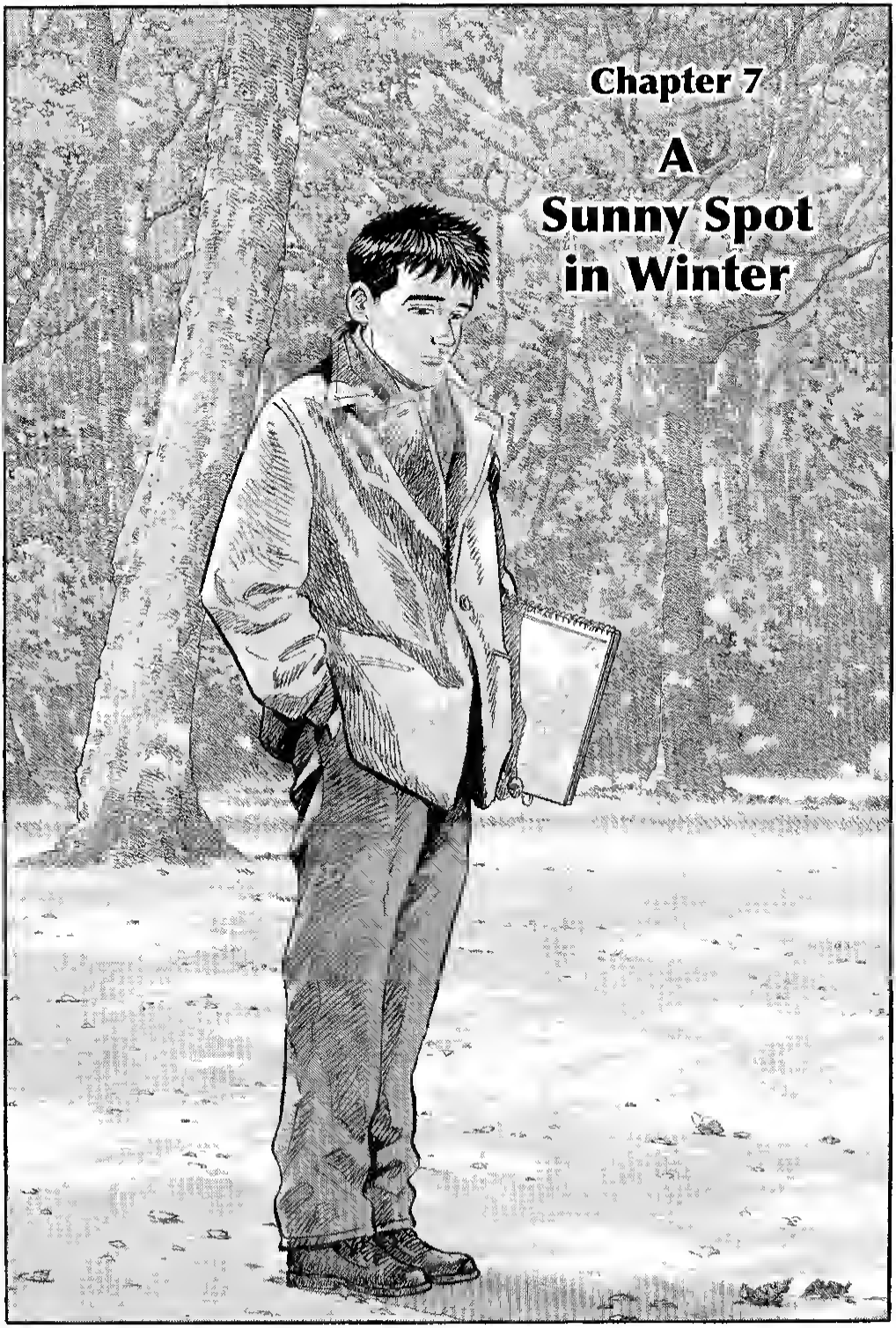
That night I finished the manga at last, and went to sleep exhausted, when...
HEY!
BOM BOM
YOU IN THERE?
HN...?
COMING!
HEY!
KID!
OH... MR. KIKUCHI.
WHAT, WERE YOU SLEEPING ALREADY?
I'VE GOTTA TALK TO YOU.
GOOD EVENING.
SORRY FOR WAKING YOU.
OH!
MISS...!
I knew immediately it was about Mariko.
MARI SAID...
...SHE WANTS ME TO TELL YOU SOME THINGS.
OKAY.

YOU SEE...
...SHE'S GONE BACK TO THE HOSPITAL IN OUR HOME TOWN, SENDAI.
HUH? WHEN...?
SO SHE'S NOT HERE ANYMORE?
I'M SORRY FOR NOT SAYING ANYTHING BEFORE...
...BUT, HER CONDITION GOT MUCH WORSE...
...
...AND,...
...SHE LOST SOME MORE WEIGHT TOO.
SHE SAID SHE DIDN'T WANT YOU TO SEE HER FACE WHEN SHE'S SICK LIKE THIS.
I SEE... WAS SHE REALLY THAT BAD?
WAS IT MY FAULT?
THAT DAY...IN SHINJUKU.
NOT AT ALL.
THAT HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH IT, SO STOP WORRYING. HER CONSTITUTION'S ALWAYS BEEN LIKE THIS.
SHE WAS VERY UPSET...
...ABOUT LEAVING WITHOUT SAYING ANYTHING.
...
ANYWAY, THAT'S WHAT I WANTED TO TELL YOU.
WE OWE YOU FOR SO MUCH.
NO... YOU DON'T.
SORRY ABOUT THIS, KID.

CAN'T I SEE HER?
I HAVE SOMETHING TO SHOW HER.
A MANGA.
I DREW IT FOR HER. I FINALLY FINISHED IT THIS MORNING.
SHE TOLD ME SHE'D MEET WITH ME WHEN THE MANGA WAS FINISHED.
OH, WHAT'S THAT?
OH, YES..
...I REMEMBER. THAT'S RIGHT.
"WISHING ON A STAR".
WHAT A LOVELY TITLE.
IT DOESN'T SEEM LIKE YOUR STYLE...
...BUT IT DOES LOOK INTERESTING.
YOU THINK SO?
WE THOUGHT UP THIS MANGA TOGETHER.

I'M NOT SURPRISED.
MARI ALWAYS LOVED MAKING UP STORIES.
IT'S A GOOD STORY. THANK YOU.
BUT...
...SHE CAN'T SEE YOU RIGHT NOW.
...
EVEN THOUGH SHE PROMISED.
I'M SORRY.
WELL THEN...
...WOULD YOU GIVE IT TO HER FOR ME, PLEASE?
OH? ARE YOU SURE?
BUT THEY'RE YOUR PRECIOUS ORIGINALS.
YES, IT'S FINE.
I DREW IT FOR HER AFTER ALL.
...
IF I HADN'T MET HER, I WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN ABLE TO WRITE THIS MANGA.
MARI...
...IS SURE TO BE PLEASED.
I sensed it was pointless to ask any more questions about Mariko's condition.

I was so grateful to her.
She taught me...
...about the fun in drawing manga.
The joy of creating a story.
ONLY TEN PAGES TO GO.
DO THIS SPREAD PLEASE.
AAH! THERE'S NOT MUCH TIME!
ALL RIGHT, HAMAGUCHI, YOU GIVE IT A SHOT.
AND HOP TO IT!
WILL DO!
I wonder if Mariko has read our manga.


Chapter 7
A
Sunny Spot
in Winter

November, 1968.
WOW!
SO YOU REALLY FINISHED YOUR MANGA?
GOOD JOB, SEEING IT THROUGH TO THE END.
SO THEN WHAT?
HAVE YOU SHOWN IT TO ANY EDITORS?
NAW ...!
IT'S STILL SO AMATEUR.
THERE'S NO POINT.
HMPF
YOU DON'T KNOW THAT!
WHY DON'T YOU SHOW IT TO ME?
HUH?
YEAH, BUT...
...IT'S EMBARRASSING.
YOU MORON. WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
WE USED TO SHOW EACH OTHER OUR CRAPPY DRAWINGS IN HIGH SCHOOL, DIDN'T WE?
SHOW IT TO ME NEXT TIME.
IF YOU INSIST.
SLURP

SO.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING OVER NEW YEAR?
YOU HAVEN'T BEEN BACK HOME ONCE SINCE YOU MOVED HERE, RIGHT?
WHAT IF WE WENT TOGETHER?
...
I'M NOT SURE. OUR WORK SCHEDULE STILL ISN'T SET YET.
YOU KNOW...
CRUNCH CRUNCH
...LATELY...
...YOU'VE BEEN A BIT WEIRD.
I'd been working as an assistant to a manga artist for almost two years.
I had just drawn my own manga for the first time because of a certain girl.
Since then I'd been constantly anxious about whether she'd read the manga or not.

I couldn't focus at work either. From time to time, I would space out.
HAMA-GUCHI!
HEY, HAMA-GUCHI!
OH... UH...
...YEAH!
QUIT DAYDREAMING!
HOW LONG ARE YOU GONNA WORK ON THAT PAGE!
YES.
SORRY.
LOOK.
YOU FORGOT TO DO THE FILLS ON THE PREVIOUS PAGE.
OH!
I'M SO SORRY.
HAVE YOU LOST YOUR DRIVE SINCE YOU FINISHED YOUR OWN MANGA?
NO, NOT AT ALL!
OH!
DID YOU DRAW A MANGA, HAMAGUCHI?
YEAH, HE DID.
I TOLD HIM HE SHOULD SHOW IT TO YOU, MISS TONO, SINCE HE DID ALL THE WORK OF DRAWING IT.
EVEN MR. KONDO SAYS HE DID A GOOD JOB ON IT TOO.
YES...
...BUT... THING IS.

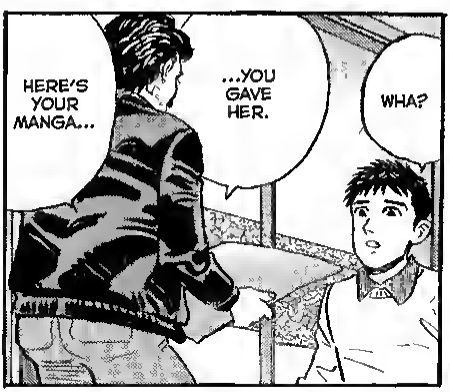
THERE'S SOMETHING WEIRD ABOUT OUR HAMAGUCHI, EH?
WHAT'S THE MATTER? LET ME SEE IT, HAMAGUCHI.
WHERE ARE THEY? IN YOUR ROOM?
NO...
...RIGHT NOW, THEY'RE... I MEAN.
OH, YOU COMPLETE MILKSOP!
OKAY...
...BUT I DON'T HAVE THE PAGES RIGHT NOW.
GET IT TOGETHER.
YOU'VE STILL GOT BACKGROUNDS ON FIVE PAGES TO DO!
ALL RIGHT, DOING IT.
She was the one that taught me...
...about the fun of drawing manga and the joy in creating a story.
But right now, my emotions were drifting in the air. My thoughts full of her.

After work finished, I couldn't do anything
BOM BOM BOM

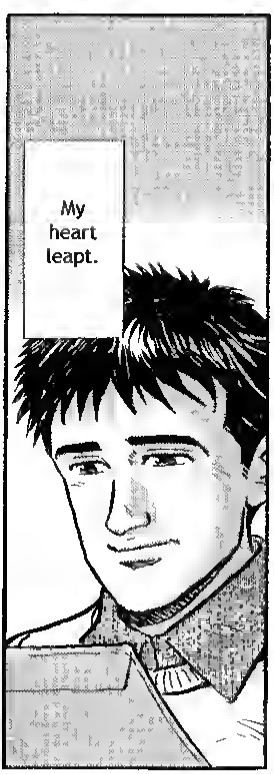
HEY!
HM?
YOU IN THERE?

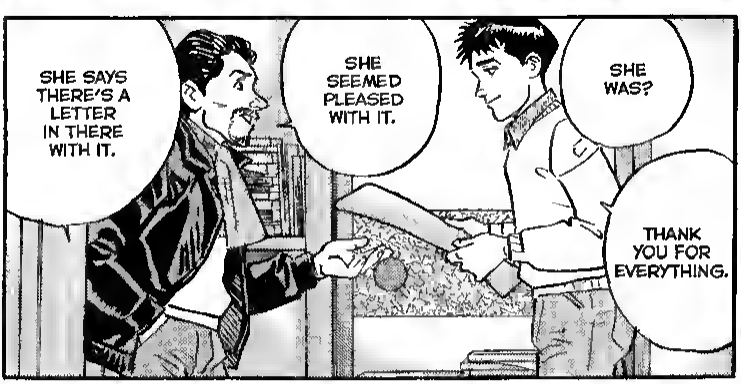
GCH_K

HEY!
KID!
MR. KIKUCHI.


HERE'S YOUR MANGA...
...YOU GAVE HER.
WHA?

MARI SAID SHE READ IT...
...SO HER SISTER BROUGHT IT BACK.


My heart leapt.

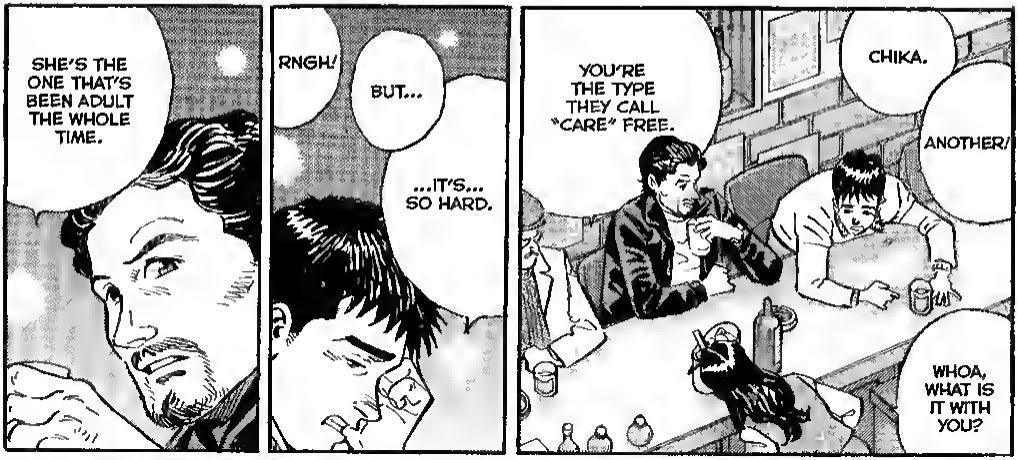

SHE SAYS THERE'S A LETTER IN THERE WITH IT.
SHE SEEMED PLEASED WITH IT.
SHE WAS?
THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING.

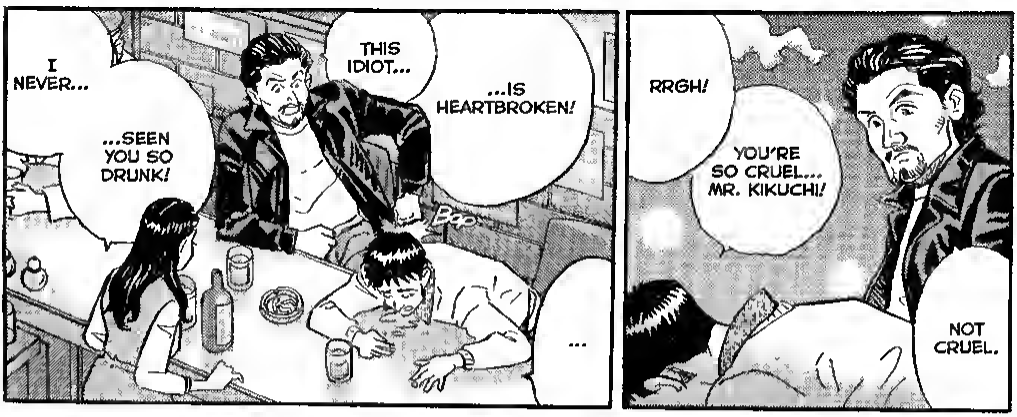
OKAY, SEE YA.
I'LL BE AT "AMMONITE", SO IF YOU WANT A DRINK, COME ON BY.
SURE THING.
In reality...
BTAM
...just what was it I had been expecting?
"I'm truly sorry I left without saying anything. I worried you, didn't I?
"I read the manga. It was very good! Please keep at it."
That's all it said.

GLP
CHIKA.
ANOTHER!
MY!
YOU'RE GOING FULL SPEED TODAY.
IS SOMETHING UP?
KID, IS THERE...
...SOMETHING YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT?
...
D... DO...
...YOU THINK...
...SHE HATES ME?
WHAT?
ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT MARI?
YES.
YOU DIMWIT! HOW WOULD I KNOW THAT!
SHE... WENT BACK TO SENDAI WITHOUT SAYING ANYTHING.
AND EVEN THE LETTER...
...DID SHE ACTUALLY WRITE THIS?

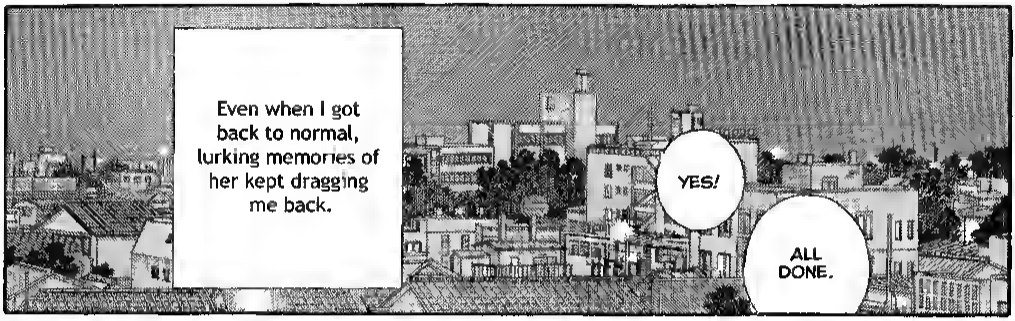
WHAT'S TO BE UPSET WITH?
SHE'S EXPRESSED THE BEST OF HER FEELINGS, HASN'T SHE?
SO, WHAT ...?
YOU THINK HER SISTER WROTE THIS INSTEAD OF HER?
I...I THOUGHT SHE'D TALK MORE ABOUT THE MANGA.
HA!
"I LOVE YOU. PLEASE COME SEE ME RIGHT AWAY!"
YOU WANTED HER TO WRITE SOMETHING LIKE THAT?
NAÏVE, DON'T YOU THINK?
TH...
...THAT'S NOT IT.
DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND HER SITUATION? SHE WROTE WHAT SHE COULD IN THAT LETTER.
HRR!
NGHH!
DEAR!
HE'S WHIMPERING ALL OF A SUDDEN!
I... I NEVER EVEN...
...TRIED TO THINK... ABOUT IT.

THAT'S WHY...
...WHEN SHE LEFT... IT WAS...
... HNGH!
WHAT IS IT YOU WANT TO SAY?
URR!
I WANT TO SEE HER.
SEE HER AGAIN... AND TELL HER MY FEELINGS.
YOU JUST DON'T GET IT, DO YOU?
YOU THINK SHE'LL BE HAPPY TO HEAR ABOUT THOSE FEELINGS OF YOURS?
...
HFF
IT'S EXACTLY THOSE FEELINGS THAT ARE WELLING UP RIGHT NOW AND MAKING YOU BLIND TO EVERYTHING.
HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT ABOUT HER FEELINGS?
HRRR!
WHY DO YOU THINK MARI WENT AWAY?
HFF
BECAUSE SHE'S THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE.
WHAT ABOUT YOU?
URR!


SHE'S THE ONE THAT'S BEEN ADULT THE WHOLE TIME.
RNGH!
BUT...
...IT'S... SO HARD.
YOU'RE THE TYPE THEY CALL "CARE" FREE.
CHIKA.
ANOTHER!
WHOA, WHAT IS IT WITH YOU?

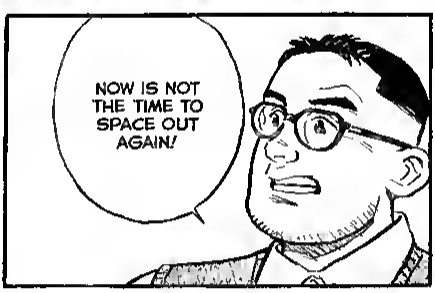

I NEVER...
...SEEN YOU SO DRUNK!
THIS IDIOT...
...IS HEARTBROKEN!
Boo...
...
RRGH!
YOU'RE SO CRUEL... MR. KIKUCHI!
NOT CRUEL.

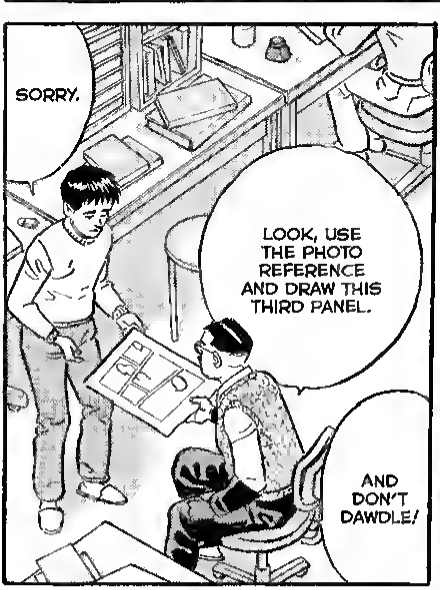
WHERE...
...IS SHE...?
TELL ME, PLEEEASE!
RRR!
SHWF
KDUNK
AAH!
NOW HE'S GONE AND DONE IT!
GODDAMN IT.
I SHOULDN'T HAVE LET HIM DRINK SO MUCH.

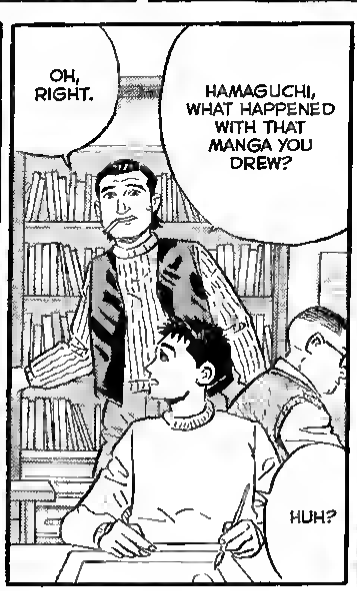

Even when I got back to normal, lurking memories of her kept dragging me back.
YES!
ALL DONE.

THIS IS THE LAST PAGE.
HEY.
GIVE IT SOMEONE WITH THEIR HANDS FREE.
HEY, HAMAGUCHI.

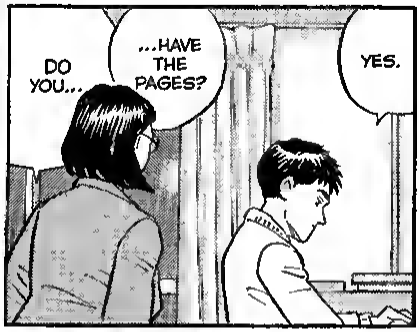
HAMA-GUCHI!
YES?

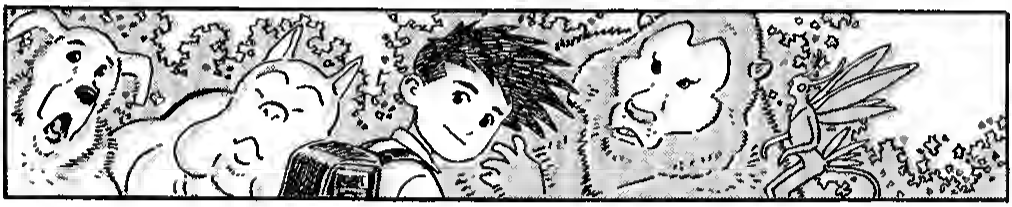

NOW IS NOT THE TIME TO SPACE OUT AGAIN!

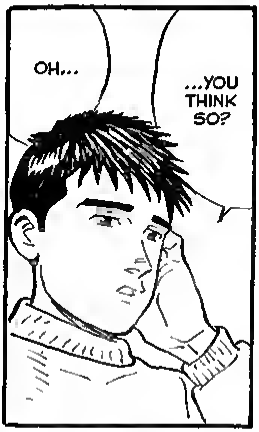

SORRY.
LOOK, USE THE PHOTO REFERENCE AND DRAW THIS THIRD PANEL.
AND DON'T DAWDLE!


OH, RIGHT.
HAMAGUCHI, WHAT HAPPENED WITH THAT MANGA YOU DREW?
HUH?

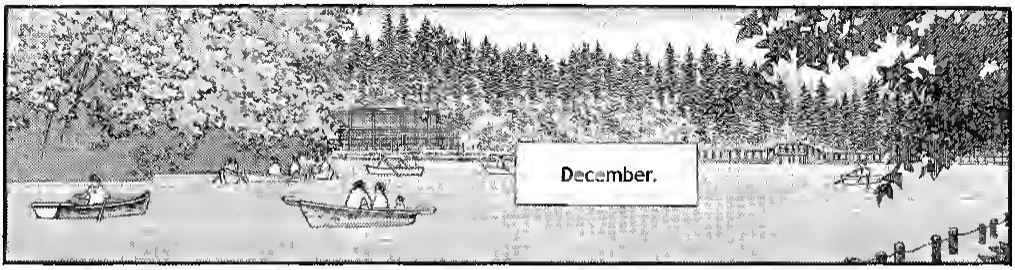
DID YOU SHOW IT TO MISS TONO?

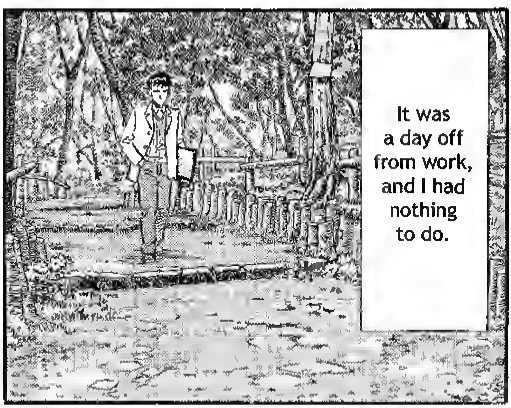






* *supo-kon* : sport et persévérance


December.


It was a day off from work, and I had nothing to do.

...I'd come to my usual park, sketchbook under my arm.

By the time I looked up...

I had walked here often with her.

It was cold and a weekday so people were sparse.

The tropical bird hothouse grew thick with plants.
The flapping of wings and chirping rung out.
PHEW. HOT IN HERE!
I remembered sitting here on this bench talking with her.
TAP
TAP
OH...!
NOW, NOW, KO-CHAN!
I TOLD YOU YOU'D HAVE AN ACCIDENT IF YOU RAN SO FAST, DIDN'T I?
PLAS
BAAH!

HERE NOW...
...DON'T CRY, DON'T CRY.
BHH!
BOO-HOO!
THERE, THERE.
BE STRONG, KO-CHAN. BE STRONG.
...
M...
...MISS...?
...
MAMA!
UH... UM.
IT IS YOU... MISS AYAKO?
HAMA-GUCHI... KUN?
YES!
IT CAN'T BE!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE...?

She was the daughter of the boss at a company I'd worked at in Kyoto two years earlier.
Back then, I had effectively abetted in her elopement.
IS THAT SO?
SO YOU QUIT THE COMPANY BECAUSE OF THAT.
I'M SORRY.
NO NEED.
THIS LITTLE ONE WAS ALREADY IN MY BELLY...
...AT THE TIME.
OH?
SO, HAMAGUCHI ...
...WHAT ARE YOU DOING NOW?
MANGA... I'M AN ASSISTANT TO A MANGA ARTIST.
IT WAS BECAUSE OF THAT...
... I HAD TO LEAVE WHEN I DID, BEFORE IT SHOWED. I HAD LITTLE CHOICE
OH, NOW I SEE.

OOH! THAT SOUNDS INTERESTING!
ARE YOU GOING TO BECOME A MANGA ARTIST?
WELL... I DON'T KNOW IF I'LL ACTUALLY BE ABLE TO, BUT I'M GIVING IT A SHOT.
THE WORK IS HARD BUT FUN.
IT SEEMS I'M GOING TO FIND SOMETHING I LIKE TO DO.
REALLY?
THAT'S SO GREAT.
YOU NEVER KNOW WHERE PEOPLE WILL GO OR WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THEM.
A MANGA ARTIST, EH.
BUT, I'M SURPRISED TO SEE YOU HERE OF ALL PLACES.
YEAH, THAT'S SURPRISING TOO!
I REMEMBER YOU GOING TO THE ZOO BACK THEN.
DO YOU STILL DO SKETCHES?
YUP.
THESE?
CAN I HAVE A LOOK?
FULL OF ANIMALS, AS ALWAYS.
MAMA! EFFALANT!
HEE! ELEPHANT!

HE'S FINALLY STARTED USING WORDS.
THOUGH I STILL DON'T KNOW WHAT HE'S SAYING HALF THE TIME.
BOO!
BOO!
This first time seeing Ayako in ages, she seemed tired somehow.
IS YOUR HOUSE...
...NEAR HERE?
YEAH.
MY JOB'S IN SHINJUKU, BUT THE RENT IS TOO HIGH THERE TO LIVE.
JOB...? YOU'RE WORKING?
IT'S A CLUB IN SHINJUKU. I WORK EVENINGS.
MY HUSBAND ...
...IS UNEMPLOYED RIGHT NOW.
HE WAS WORKING FOR A FABRICS SHOP IN NINGYOCHO, BUT...
...HE HAS THE HEART OF AN ARTISAN.
HE SAID HE DIDN'T WANT TO HAVE TO DO SHODDY WORK.
...
SO, I'LL BE WORKING UNTIL HE FINDS A JOB.

FOR THIS CHILD'S SAKE.
SO, YOU'VE NOT BEEN BACK TO KYOTO?
NAW.
I GUESS IT'S STUBBORNNESS OR PRIDE.
THE WAY THINGS ARE NOW, I CAN'T GO BACK TO FATHER FOR HELP.
NOW, KO-CHAN.
WHERE ARE YOU OFF TO?
YOU'LL PROBABLY THINK IT'S STRANGE.
BUT, I'M HAPPY LIKE THIS.
MAMA.
YES, WE HAVE DIFFICULTIES. BUT, SURE ENOUGH... I LOVE HIM.
OF COURSE, HIS BEING BORN IS PART OF IT...
...BUT THAT MAN MAKES ME HAPPY.
MAYBE YOU STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND IT...
...BUT, JUST BEING WITH THE PERSON YOU LOVE,...
...THAT ALONE IS HAPPINESS ENOUGH.

IF YOU FIND SOMEONE YOU LOVE TOO, HAMAGUCHI ...
...THEN YOU'LL KNOW HOW I FEEL.
...
HAMA-GUCHI.
DO YOU HAVE A GIRL-FRIEND?
HUH?
WELL, SORT OF.
IF YOU FIND SOMEONE GOOD...
...YOU BE SURE TO TELL THEM.
YOU HAVE TO TELL THEM...
...THAT YOU LOVE THEM.
SURE.
I'M SO GLAD...
...I GOT TO SEE YOU TODAY.
YEAH.
ME TOO.
IT'S BEEN ALMOST TWO YEARS ALREADY.
IT'S GONE SO FAST.

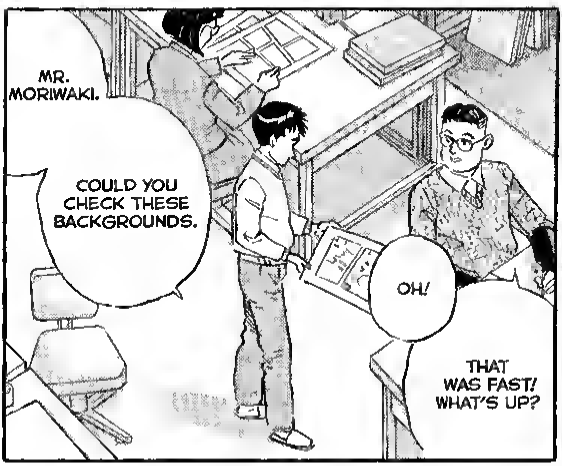
Listening to Ayako talk, I felt the confusion clearing away.
HAAANK
KDNK KDNK
KDNK
I headed straight for Shinjuku.
HMM.
I'M SURE IT WAS AROUND HERE.
IT WAS A LONG TIME BACK THOUGH.
I JUST HOPE SHE HASN'T MOVED.
OH...!

THIS IS IT.
NOK NOK
I remembered being brought back here drunk by Kikuchi ages ago.
SHE'S NOT HERE. MAYBE SHE'S...
...NOT COME HOME FROM WORK YET.
The apartment of her sister - Kikuchi's girlfriend.
I decided to wait.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?!
BRRR ...!
SO COOOLD!
OH, NO!
And so, six hours later, after 11:00 P.M.
WHAT IN...!

I NEVER...
...IMAGINED THAT ANYTHING LIKE THIS WOULD HAPPEN.
I'M SORRY.
YOU'RE A LOT OF TROUBLE.
IS SHE... ALL RIGHT?
I READ THE LETTER BUT, SOMEHOW ...
...IT WASN'T HER.
OH... THANKS.
YOU WERE REALLY GOOD FOR HER.
MARI SEEMED TO HAVE A GOOD TIME, AND SHE WAS VERY HAPPY.
FWPP
AND I'M GRATEFUL TOO.
BUT SHE SAID SHE COULDN'T LEAD YOU ON ANYMORE.
...
WHY? WHY CAN'T I SEE HER?
"WHY"...?

MARI IS SICK.
SHE COULD STILL GET WORSE, BUT SHE CAN'T GET ANY BETTER AGAIN.
SHE HAS TO LIVE HER LIFE...
...ALWAYS CONSCIOUS OF HER HEALTH AND WHAT COULD HAPPEN.
WOULDN'T THAT BOTHER YOU?
IF WHAT YOU'RE FEELING IS MOMENTARY, THEN PLEASE FORGET ABOUT HER. THINK ABOUT POOR MARI.
...
CAN YOU UNDER-STAND?
ALTHOUGH IT MAY SOUND LIKE SHE'S JUST BEING SELFISH.
YES.
I UNDERSTAND.
HOW DID IT COME TO THIS!
SO PLEASE LET ME SEE HER JUST ONE MORE TIME.
OH FOR...!
YOU DON'T GET IT AT ALL! DO YOU?

We were doing a four-day nonstop work shift, as usual.


MR. MORIWAKI.
COULD YOU CHECK THESE BACKGROUNDS.
OH!
THAT WAS FAST! WHAT'S UP?

OKAY, HERE...
...COULD YOU TRY DOING JUST THE STORM SCENE?
OKAY.

YO!
STILL HARD AT WORK?

OH NO, HERE'S THE TROUBLEMAKER.
AND DRUNK AGAIN, RIGHT?

HEY, KID!
YOU JUST WENT AND GOT ALL DETERMINED, DIDN'T YOU?
PLEASE, MR. KIKUCHI.
DON'T BOTHER HIM WHILE HE'S WORKING.

I HEARD FROM HER SISTER. YOU'RE GOING TO SENDAI.
HE'S GOING THERE TO MEET HER.
BOY, EVEN INNOCENT BASTARDS ARE LOADS OF TROUBLE.
HER?
PLEASE STOP, MR. KIKUCHI!
HUH?
SENDAI?
EH? WHAT ARE YOU GOING THERE FOR?
"WISHING ON A STAR", WAS IT?
YOU DREW IT FOR HER, TRUE?
OH, IS THAT RIGHT?
THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF QUITE LIKES HAMAGUCHI'S MANGA.
OH, THAT'S MORE GREAT NEWS. SHE'LL BE SO HAPPY!
HEY, KIKUCHI.
STOP HAZING MY ASSISTANT!
YES, YES, YES.
OH, MANGA'S SO WONDERFUL.
YOU'RE SOUNDING NASTY NOW, MR. KIKUCHI.
MAKES ME WANNA CRY.

I couldn't think about anything but her anymore.
HAANNNK
KDNK THDNK
Directly the work finished, I headed for Sendai.
KDNK THDNK
BRRIINNG
AWW!
WHAT, IS THERE NOBODY THERE?!
AND HERE HAMAGUCHI'S MANGA IS GOING TO RUN IN THE MAGAZINE...!
THE PROOFREADING OF THE EXTRA EDITION'S GOTTA BE DONE IN ONE WEEK!
YES, SIR!
ARGH, COME ON!
SOMEBODY PICK UP ALREADY!

It was my first time in Sendai.
Her hospital was in the suburbs, about twenty minutes by bus.
My heart was pounding. I suddenly became anxious about how she was doing. I was scared!

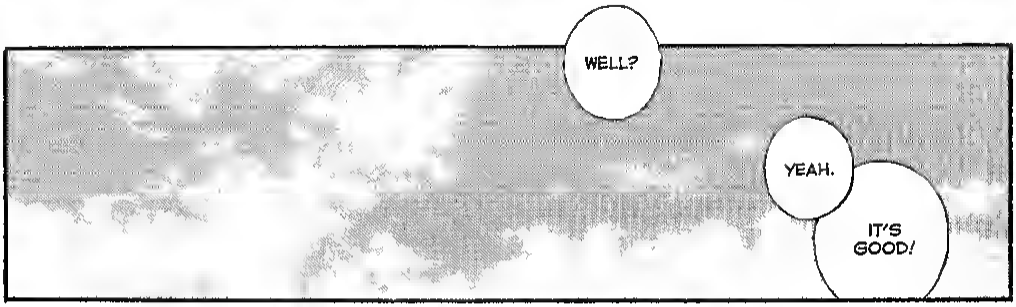
AAH...!
SAKK SAKK
I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU!
...
HAMAGUCHI.

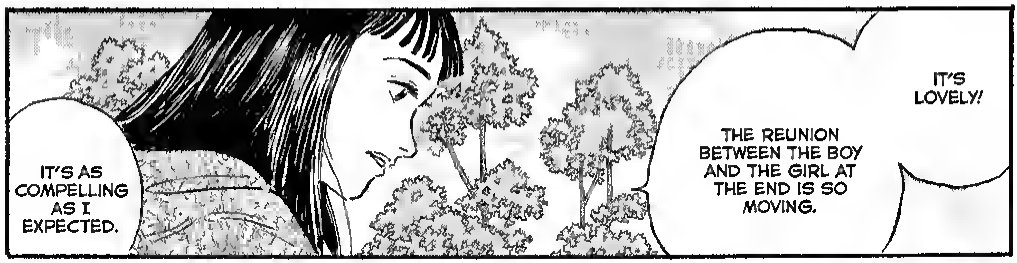
HOW DID YOU KNOW...
...I WAS COMING?
I GOT A PHONE CALL FROM MR. KIKUCHI.
AN EDITOR NAMED TONO WAS TRYING TO GET IN TOUCH WITH YOU.
WHA?!
HE SAID...
...ONCE YOU DID A FEW CORRECTIONS, YOUR MANGA WOULD RUN IN "SHONEN HOLIDAY".
...
THEY SAID YOU HAVE TO HURRY.
THERE'S ALMOST NO TIME BEFORE THE DEADLINE.
HANG IN THERE, OKAY!
BUT...
...I...!
THANK YOU...
...FOR COMING TO SEE ME.
UMMM.
I...
...I STILL...
... HAVEN'T TOLD ....!
IT'S MADE ME SO HAPPY.

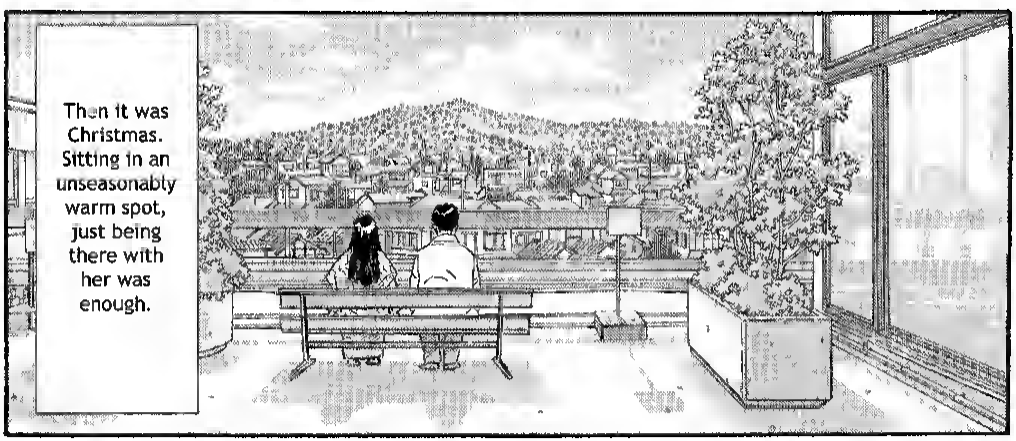
AAH...!
SQKK
HAMA-
GUCHI.
I LOVE
YOU!
...
I WAS
ABLE TO DRAW
THAT MANGA
BECAUSE
OF YOU.
I... I
JUST NEEDED
TO TELL YOU
THAT.
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
BRAVO!
HE'S A
GOOD
MATCH,
MARI.
AH,
WONDERFUL
YOUTH!

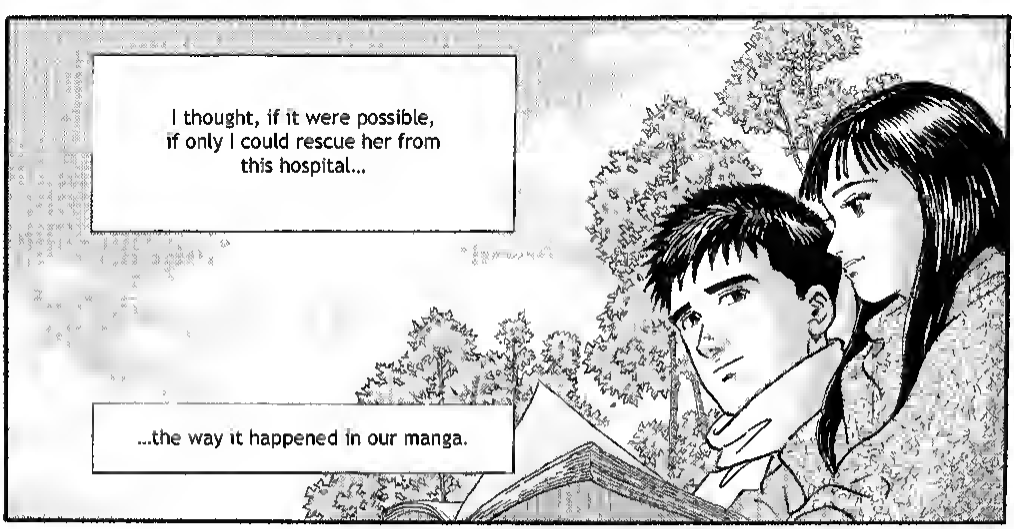
OKAY.
COME ON, GO!
OH!
BUT...!
YOUR MANGA.
GO FINISH IT!
POP
...
I'LL LOOK FORWARD TO IT.
WHEN THE MAGAZINE COMES OUT, SEND ME A COPY.
NO, I'LL COME BACK.
NEXT TIME I'LL BRING IT WITH ME!
...
YES. PLEASE.
I'M GOING TO DRAW MANGA.
YEAH.
I embraced her again. Her body felt like it had gotten even thinner.

That night, when I returned to Tokyo, I got straight to work on the corrections.
Mr. Moriwaki and Fujita helped me with the finishes.
YUP.
THIRTY PAGES.
THANK GOODNESS.
YOU MADE IT IN TIME.
YEAH, SORRY.
WHEN YOU GET PAID, YOU CAN TREAT US TO A KOREAN BARBEQUE
OH! YES, SIR!
HAHA!
DON'T BE SO SERIOUS!
IT WAS A JOKE!
A JOKE!
HA HA HA!
WELL.
IT'S BACK TO MR. KONDO'S WORK TOMORROW, SO I'LL BE COUNTING ON YOU, OK?
So my debut manga, "Wishing on a Star", appeared in the winter special edition of "Shonen Holiday".


WELL?
YEAH.
IT'S GOOD!


IT'S AS COMPELLING AS I EXPECTED.
THE REUNION BETWEEN THE BOY AND THE GIRL AT THE END IS SO MOVING.
IT'S LOVELY!


Then it was Christmas. Sitting in an unseasonably warm spot, just being there with her was enough.


I thought, if it were possible, if only I could rescue her from this hospital...
...the way it happened in our manga.